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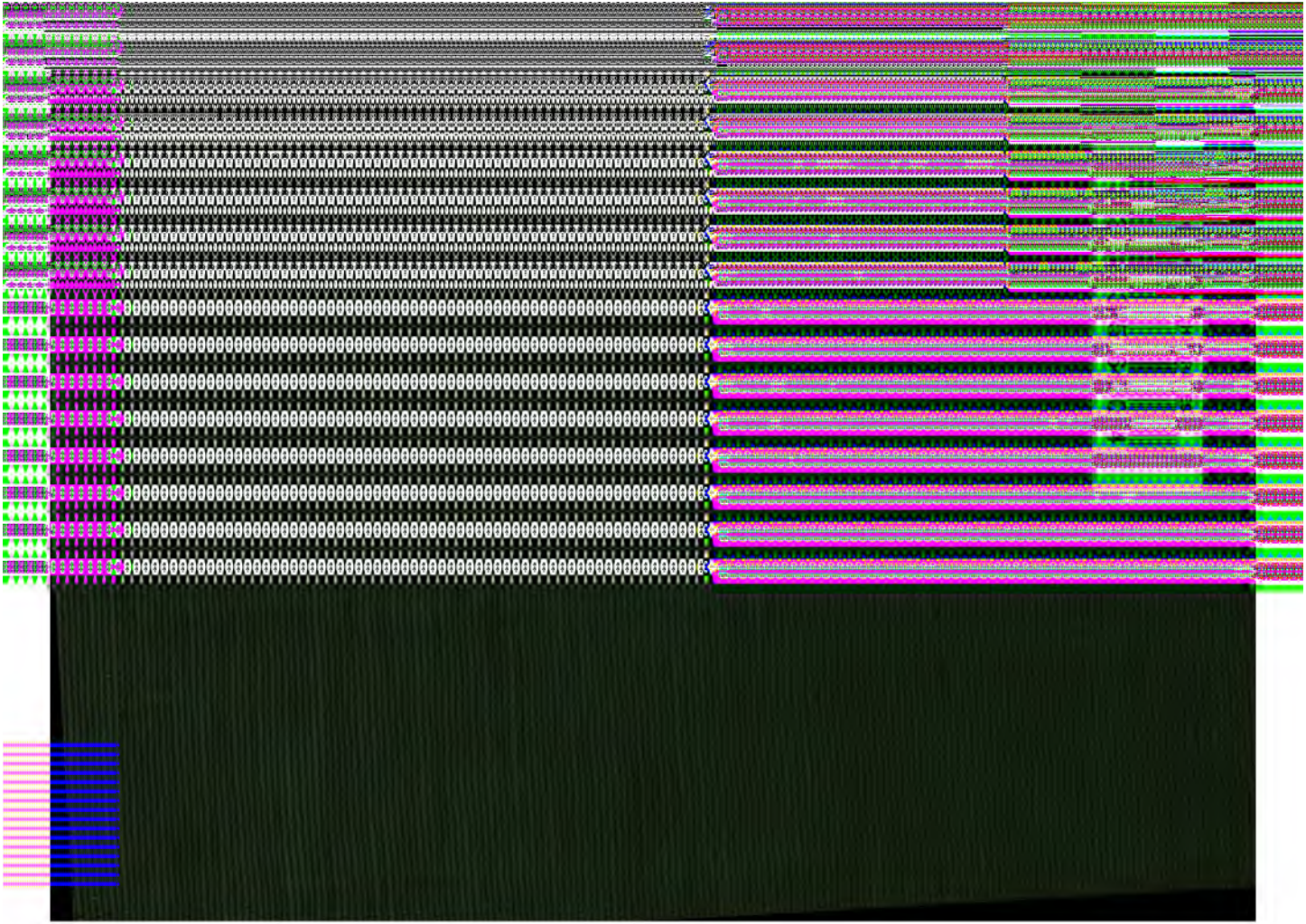

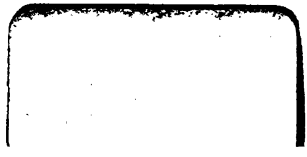

NCW
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MARCELLA

VOL. II.

MARCELLA

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

AUTHOR OF "ROBERT ELSMERE," "THE HISTORY OF DAVID GRIEVE," ETC

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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BOOK II. (*continued*).

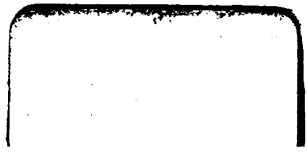
MARCELLA.

CHAPTER XII.

NEARLY three weeks passed — short flashing weeks, crowded with agitations, inward or outward, for all the persons of this story.

After the inquiry before the magistrates — conducted, as she passionately thought, with the most marked animus on the part of the bench and police towards the prisoners — had resulted in the committal for trial of Hurd and his five companions, Marcella wrote Aldous Raeburn a letter which hurt him sorely.

"Don't come over to see me for a little while," it ran. "My mind is all given over to feelings which must seem to you — which, I know, do seem to you — unreasonable and unjust. But they are my life, and when they are criticised, or even treated coldly, I cannot bear it. When you are not there to argue with, I can believe, most sincerely, that you have a right to see this matter as you do, and that it is monstrous of me to expect you to yield to me entirely in a thing that concerns your sense of public duty. But don't come now — not before the trial. I will appeal to you if I think you can help me. I *know* you will if you



NCW
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MARCELLA

VOL. II.

of the brow. "Dr. Clarke says she ought to stay in bed, but of course she won't."

"They're a-goin' to try 'im Thursday?" said Mrs. Jellison, inquiringly.

"Yes."

"An' Muster Wharton be a-goin' to defend 'im. Muster Wharton may be cliver, ee may — they do say as ee can see the grass growin', ee's that knowin' — but ee'll not get Jim Hurd off; there's nobody in the village as b'lieves for a moment as 'ow he will. They'll best 'im. Lor' bless yer, they'll best 'im. I was a-sayin' it to Isabella this afternoon — ee'll not save 'is neck, don't you be afeared."

Marcella drew herself up with a shiver of repulsion.

"Will it mend your daughter's grief to see another woman's heart broken? Don't you suppose it might bring her some comfort, Mrs. Jellison, if she were to try and forgive that poor wretch? She might remember that her husband gave him provocation, and that anyway, if his life is spared, his punishment and their misery will be heavy enough!"

"Oh, lor' no!" said Mrs. Jellison, composedly. "She don't want to be forgivin' of 'im. Mr. Harden ee come talkin' to 'er, but she isn't one o' that sort, isn't Isabella. I'm sartin sure she'll be better in 'erself when they've put 'im out o' the way. It makes her all ov a fever to think of Muster Wharton gettin' 'im off. *I* don't bear Jim Hurd no pertickler malice. Isabella may talk herself black i' the face, but she and Johnnie 'll have to come 'ome and live along o' me, whatever she may say. She can't stay in that cottage, cos they'll be wantin' it for another keeper.

Lord Maxwell ee's givin' her a fine pension, my word ee is! an' says ee'll look after Johnnie. And what with my bit airnins — we'll do, yer know, miss — we'll do!"

The old woman looked up with a nod, her green eyes sparkling with the queer inhuman light that belonged to them.

Marcella could not bring herself to say good-night to her, and was hurrying on without a word, when Mrs. Jellison stopped her.

"An' 'ow about that straw-plaitin', miss?" she said slyly.

"I have had to put it on one side for a bit," said Marcella, coldly, hating the woman's society. "I have had my hands full and Lady Winterbourne has been away, but we shall, of course, take it up again later."

She walked away quickly, and Mrs. Jellison hobbled after her, grinning to herself every now and then as she caught the straight, tall figure against the red evening sky.

"I'll go in ter town termorrer," she thought, "an' have a crack wi' Jimmy Gedge; *ee* needn't be afeard for 'is livin'. An' them great fules as ha' bin runnin' in a string arter 'er, an' cacklin' about their eighteenpence a score, as I've told 'em times, I'll eat my apron the fust week as iver they get it. I don't hold wi' ladies — no, nor passons neither — not when it comes to meddlin' wi' your wittles, an' dictatin' to yer about forgivin' them as ha' got the better ov yer. That young lady there, what do she matter? That sort's allus gaddin' about? What'll she keer about us when

she's got 'er fine husband? Here o' Saturday, gone o' Monday — that's what she is. Now Jimmy Gedge, yer kin allus count on *'im.* Thirty-six year ee ha' set there in that 'ere shop, and I guess ee'll set there till they call 'im ter kingdom come. Ee's a cheatin', sweatin', greedy old skinflint is Jimmy Gedge; but when yer wants 'im yer *kin* find 'im."

Marcella hurried home, she was expecting a letter from Wharton, the third within a week. She had not set eyes on him since they had met that first morning in the drive, and it was plain to her that he was as unwilling as she was that there should be any meeting between them. Since the moment of his taking up the case, in spite of the pressure of innumerable engagements, he had found time to send her, almost daily, sheets covered with his small even writing, in which every detail and prospect of the legal situation, so far as it concerned James Hurd, were noted and criticised with a shrewdness and fulness which never wavered, and never lost for a moment the professional note.

"Dear Miss Boyce" — the letters began — leading up to a "Yours faithfully," which Marcella read as carefully as the rest. Often, as she turned them over, she asked herself whether that scene in the library had not been a mere delusion of the brain, whether the man whose wild words and act had burnt themselves into her life could possibly be writing her these letters, in this key, without a reference, without an allusion. Every day, as she opened them, she looked them through quietly with a shaking pulse; every day she found herself proudly able to hand them on to her

mother, with the satisfaction of one who has nothing to conceal, whatever the rest of the world may suspect. He was certainly doing his best to replace their friendship on that level of high comradeship in ideas and causes which, as she told herself, it had once occupied. His own wanton aggression and her weakness had toppled it down thence, and brought it to ruin. She could never speak to him, never know him again till it was re-established. Still his letters galled her. He assumed, she supposed, that such a thing could happen, and nothing more be said about it? How little he knew her, or what she had in her mind!

Now, as she walked along, wrapped in her plaid cape, her thought was one long tumultuous succession of painful or passionate images, interrupted none the less at times by those curious self-observing pauses of which she had always been capable. She had been sitting for hours beside Mrs. Hurd, with little Willie upon her knees. The mother, always anæmic and consumptive, was by now prostrate, the prey of a long-drawn agony, peopled by visions of Jim alone and in prison — Jim on the scaffold with the white cap over his eyes — Jim in the prison coffin — which would rouse her shrieking from dreams which were the rending asunder of soul and body. Minta Hurd's love for the unhappy being who had brought her to this pass had been infinitely maternal. There had been a boundless pity in it, and the secret pride of a soul, which, humble and modest towards all the rest of the world, yet knew itself to be the breath and sustenance, the indispensable aid of one other soul in the universe, and gloried accordingly. To be cut off now from all ministration,

all comforting — to have to lie there like a log, imagining the moment when the neighbours should come in and say, "It is all over — they have broken his neck — and buried him" — it was a doom beyond all even that her timid pessimist heart had ever dreamed. She had already seen him twice in prison, and she knew that she would see him again. She was to go on Monday, Miss Boyce said, before the trial began, and after — if they brought him in guilty — they would let her say good-bye. She was always thirsting to see him. But when she went, the prison surroundings paralysed her. Both she and Hurd felt themselves caught in the wheels of a great relentless machine, of which the workings filled them with a voiceless terror. He talked to her spasmodically of the most incongruous things — breaking out sometimes with a glittering eye into a string of instances bearing on Westall's bullying and tyrannous ways. He told her to return the books Miss Boyce had lent him, but when asked if he would like to see Marcella he shrank and said no. Mr. Wharton was "doin' capital" for him; but she wasn't to count on his getting off. And he didn't know that he wanted to, neither. Once she took Willie to see him; the child nearly died of the journey; and the father, "though any one can see, miss, he's just sick for 'im," would not hear of his coming again. Sometimes he would hardly kiss her at parting; he sat on his chair, with his great head drooped forward over his red hands, lost in a kind of animal lethargy. Westall's name always roused him. Hate still survived. But it made *her* life faint within her to talk of the murdered man — wherein she showed her lack of the

usual peasant's realism and curiosity in the presence of facts of blood and violence. When she was told it was time for her to go, and the heavy door was locked behind her, the poor creature, terrified at the warder and the bare prison silences, would hurry away as though the heavy hand of this awful Justice were laid upon her too, torn by the thought of him she left behind, and by the remembrance that he had only kissed her once, and yet impelled by mere physical instinct towards the relief of Ann Mullins's rough face waiting for her — of the outer air and the free heaven.

As for Willie, he was fast dwindling. Another week or two — the doctor said — no more. He lay on Marcella's knee on a pillow, wasted to an infant's weight, panting and staring with those strange blue eyes, but always patient, always struggling to say his painful "thank you" when she fed him with some of the fruit constantly sent her from Maxwell Court. Everything that was said about his father he took in and understood, but he did not seem to fret. His mother was almost divided from him by this passivity of the dying; nor could she give him or his state much attention. Her gentle, sensitive, but not profound nature was strained already beyond bearing by more gnawing griefs.

After her long sit in Mrs. Hurd's kitchen Marcella found the air of the February evening tonic and delightful. Unconsciously impressions stole upon her — the lengthening day, the celandines in the hedges, the swelling lilac buds in the cottage gardens. They spoke to her youth, and out of mere physical congruity it could not but respond. Still, her face kept the

angered look with which she had parted from Mrs. Jellison. More than that — the last few weeks had visibly changed it, had graved upon it the signs of "living." It was more beautiful than ever in its significant black and white, but it was older — a *woman* spoke from it. Marcella had gone down into reality, and had found there the rebellion and the storm for which such souls as hers are made. Rebellion most of all. She had been living with the poor, in their stifling rooms, amid their perpetual struggle for a little food and clothes and bodily ease; she had seen this struggle, so hard in itself, combined with agonies of soul and spirit, which made the physical destitution seem to the spectator something brutally gratuitous, a piece of careless and tyrannous cruelty on the part of Nature — or God? She would hardly let herself think of Aldous — though she *must* think of him by-and-by! He and his fared sumptuously every hour! As for her, it was as though in her woman's arms, on her woman's breast, she carried Lazarus all day, stooping to him with a hungering pity. And Aldous stood aloof. Aldous would not help her — or not with any help worth having — in consoling this misery — binding up these sores. Her heart cried shame on him. She had a crime against him to confess — but she felt herself his superior none the less. If he cast her off — why then surely they would be quits, quits for good and all.

As she reached the front door of Mellor, she saw a little two-wheeled cart standing outside it, and William holding the pony.

Visitors were nowadays more common at Mellor

than they had been, and her instinct was to escape. But as she was turning to a side door William touched his cap to her.

"Mr. Wharton 's waiting to see you, miss."

She stopped sharply.

"Where is Mrs. Boyce, William?"

"In the drawing-room, miss."

She walked in calmly. Wharton was standing on the rug, talking; Mrs. Boyce was listening to what he had to say with the light repellent air Marcella knew so well.

When she came in Wharton stepped forward ceremoniously to shake hands, then began to speak at once, with the manner of one who is on a business errand and has no time to waste.

"I thought it best, Miss Boyce, as I had unexpectedly a couple of spare hours this evening, to come and let you know how things were going. You understand that the case comes on at the assizes next Thursday?"

Marcella assented. She had seated herself on the old sofa beside the fire, her ungloved hands on her knee. Something in her aspect made Wharton's eyes waver an instant as he looked down upon her — but it was the only sign.

"I should like to warn you," he said gravely, "that I entertain no hope whatever of getting James Hurd off. I shall do my best, but the verdict will certainly be murder; and the judge, I think, is sure to take a severe view. We may get a recommendation to mercy, though I believe it to be extremely unlikely. But if so, the influence of the judge, according to what I hear,

will probably be against us. The prosecution have got together extremely strong evidence — as to Hurd's long connection with the gang, in spite of the Raeburns' kindness — as to his repeated threats that he would 'do for' Westall if he and his friends were interrupted — and so on. His own story is wholly uncorroborated; and Dynes's deposition, so far as it goes, is all against it."

He went on to elaborate these points with great clearness of exposition and at some length; then he paused.

"This being so," he resumed, "the question is, what can be done? There must be a petition. Amongst my own party I shall be, of course, able to do something, but we must have men of all sides. Without some at least of the leading Conservatives, we shall fare badly. In one word — do you imagine that you can induce Mr. Raeburn and Lord Maxwell to sign?"

Mrs. Boyce watched him keenly. Marcella sat in frozen paleness.

"I will try," she said at last, with deliberation.

"Then" — he took up his gloves — "there may be a chance for us. If you cannot succeed, no one else can. But if Lord Maxwell and Mr. Raeburn can be secured, others will easily follow. Their names — especially under all the circumstances — will carry a peculiar weight. I may say everything, in the first instance — the weight, the first effect of the petition — depends on them. Well, then, I leave it in your hands. No time should be lost after the sentence. As to the grounds of our plea, I shall, of course, lay them down in court to the best of my ability."

"I shall be there," she interrupted.

He started. So did Mrs. Boyce, but characteristically she made no comment.

"Well, then," he resumed after a pause, "I need say no more for the present. How is the wife?"

She replied, and a few other formal sentences of inquiry or comment passed between them.

"And your election?" said Mrs. Boyce, still studying him with hostile eyes, as he got up to take leave.

"To-morrow!" He threw up his hands with a little gesture of impatience. "That at least will be one thread spun off and out of the way, whatever happens. I must get back to Widrington as fast as my pony can carry me. Good-bye, Miss Boyce."

Marcella went slowly upstairs. The scene which had just passed was unreal, impossible; yet every limb was quivering. Then the sound of the front door shutting sent a shock through her whole nature. The first sensation was one of horrible emptiness, forlornness. The next—her mind threw itself with fresh vehemence upon the question, "Can I, by any means, get my way with Aldous?"

CHAPTER XIII.

"And may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

The deep-pitched words fell slowly on Marcella's ears, as she sat leaning forward in the gallery of the Widrington Assize Court. Women were sobbing beside and behind her. Minta Hurd, to her left, lay in a half-swoon against her sister-in-law, her face buried in Ann's black shawl. For an instant after Hurd's death sentence had been spoken Marcella's nerves ceased to throb — the long exhaustion of feeling stopped. The harsh light and shade of the ill-lit room; the gas-lamps in front of the judge, blanching the ranged faces of the jury; the long table of reporters below, some writing, but most looking intently towards the dock; the figure of Wharton opposite, in his barrister's gown and wig — that face of his, so small, nervous, delicate — the frowning eyebrows a dark bar under the white of the wig — his look, alert and hostile, fixed upon the judge; the heads and attitudes of the condemned men, especially the form of a fair-haired youth, the principal murderer of Charlie Dynes, who stood a little in front of the line, next to Hurd, and overshadowing his dwarf's stature — these things Marcella saw indeed; for years after she could have described them point by point; but for some seconds or minutes her eyes stared at them without

conscious reaction of the mind on the immediate spectacle.

In place of it, the whole day, all these hours that she had been sitting there, brushed before her in a synthesis of thought, replacing the stream of impressions and images. The crushing accumulation of hostile evidence — witness after witness coming forward to add to the damning weight of it; the awful weakness of the defence — Wharton's irritation under it — the sharpness, the useless, acrid ability of his cross-examinations; yet, contrasting with the legal failure, the personal success, the mixture of grace with energy, the technical accomplishment of the manner, as one wrestling before his equals — nothing left here of the garrulous vigour and brutality of the labourers' meeting! — the masterly use of all that could avail, the few quiet words addressed at the end to the pity of the jury, and by implication to the larger ethical sense of the community,— all this she thought of with great intellectual clearness while the judge's sonorous voice rolled along, sentencing each prisoner in turn. Horror and pity were alike weary; the brain asserted itself.

The court was packed. Aldous Raeburn sat on Marcella's right hand; and during the day the attention of everybody in the dingy building had been largely divided between the scene below, and that strange group in the gallery where the man who had just been elected Conservative member for East Brookshire, who was Lord Maxwell's heir, and Westall's employer, sat beside his betrothed, in charge of a party which comprised not only Marcella Boyce,

but the wife, sister, and little girl of Westall's murderer.

On one occasion some blunt answer of a witness had provoked a laugh coming no one knew whence. The judge turned to the gallery and looked up sternly — "I cannot conceive why men and women — women especially — should come crowding in to hear such a case as this; but if I hear another laugh I shall clear the court." Marcella, whose whole conscious nature was by now one network of sensitive nerve, saw Aldous flush and shrink as the words were spoken. Then, looking across the court, she caught the eye of an old friend of the Raeburns, a county magistrate. At the judge's remark he had turned involuntarily to where she and Aldous sat; then, as he met Miss Boyce's face, instantly looked away again. She perfectly — passionately — understood that Brookshire was very sorry for Aldous Raeburn that day.

The death sentences — three in number — were over. The judge was a very ordinary man; but, even for the ordinary man, such an act carries with it a great tradition of what is befitting, which imposes itself on voice and gesture. When he ceased, the deep breath of natural emotion could be felt and heard throughout the crowded court; loud wails of sobbing women broke from the gallery.

"Silence!" cried an official voice, and the judge resumed, amid stifled sounds that stabbed Marcella's sense, once more nakedly alive to everything around it.

The sentences to penal servitude came to an end also. Then a ghastly pause. The line of prisoners directed by the warders turned right about face towards

a door in the back wall of the court. As the men filed out, the tall, fair youth, one of those condemned to death, stopped an instant and waved his hand to his sobbing sweetheart in the gallery. Hurd also turned irresolutely.

"Look!" exclaimed Ann Mullins, propping up the fainting woman beside her, "he's goin'."

Marcella bent forward. She, rather than the wife, caught the last look on his large dwarf's face, so white and dazed, the eyes blinking under the gas.

Aldous touched her softly on the arm.

"Yes," she said quickly, "yes, we must get her out. Ann, can you lift her?"

Aldous went to one side of the helpless woman: Ann Mullins held her on the other. Marcella followed, pressing the little girl close against her long black cloak. The gallery made way for them; every one looked and whispered till they had passed. Below, at the foot of the stairs, they found themselves in a passage crowded with people — lawyers, witnesses, officials, mixed with the populace. Again a road was opened for Aldous and his charges.

"This way, Mr. Raeburn," said a policeman, with alacrity. "Stand back, please! Is your carriage there, sir?"

"Let Ann Mullins take her — put them into the cab — I want to speak to Mr. Wharton," said Marcella in Aldous's ear.

"Get me a cab at once," he said to the policeman, "and tell my carriage to wait."

"Miss Boyce!"

Marcella turned hastily and saw Wharton beside

her. Aldous also saw him, and the two men interchanged a few words.

"There is a private room close by," said Wharton, "I am to take you there, and Mr. Raeburn will join us at once."

He led her along a corridor, and opened a door to the left. They entered a small dingy room, looking through a begrimed window on a courtyard. The gas was lit, and the table was strewn with papers.

"Never, never more beautiful!" flashed through Wharton's mind, "with that knit, strenuous brow — that tragic scorn for a base world — that royal gait — "

Aloud he said:

"I have done my best privately among the people I can get at, and I thought, before I go up to town to-night — you know Parliament meets on Monday? — I would show you what I had been able to do, and ask you to take charge of a copy of the petition." He pointed to a long envelope lying on the table. "I have drafted it myself — I think it puts all the points we can possibly urge — but as to the names — "

He took out a folded sheet of paper from his breast pocket.

"It won't do," he said, looking down at it, and shaking his head. "As I said to you, it is so far political merely. There is a very strong Liberal and Radical feeling getting up about the case. But that won't carry us far. This petition with these names is a demonstration against game preserving and keepers' tyranny. What we want is the co-operation of a *neighbourhood*, especially of its leading citizens.

However, I explained all this to you — there is no need to discuss it. Will you look at the list?"

Still holding it, he ran his finger over it, commenting here and there. She stood beside him; the sleeve of his gown brushed her black cloak; and under his perfect composure there beat a wild exultation in his power — without any apology, any forgiveness — to hold her there, alone with him, listening — her proud head stooped to his — her eye following his with this effort of anxious attention.

She made a few hurried remarks on the names, but her knowledge of the county was naturally not very serviceable. He folded up the paper and put it back.

"I think we understand," he said. "You will do what you can in the only quarter" — he spoke slowly — "that can really aid, and you will communicate with me at the House of Commons? I shall do what I can, of course, when the moment comes, in Parliament, and meanwhile I shall start the matter in the Press — our best hope. The Radical papers are already taking it up."

There was a sound of steps in the passage outside. A policeman opened the door, and Aldous Raeburn entered. His quick look ran over the two figures standing beside the table.

"I had some difficulty in finding a cab," he explained, "and we had to get some brandy; but she came round, and we got her off. I sent one of our men with her. The carriage is here."

He spoke — to Marcella — with some formality. He was very pale, but there was both authority and tension in his bearing.

"I have been consulting with Miss Boyce," said Wharton, with equal distance of manner, "as to the petition we are sending up to the Home Office."

Aldous made no reply.

"One word, Miss Boyce," — Wharton quietly turned to her. "May I ask you to read the petition carefully, before you attempt to do anything with it? It lays stress on the *only* doubt that can reasonably be felt after the evidence, and after the judge's summing up. That particular doubt I hold to be entirely untouched by the trial; but it requires careful stating — the issues may easily be confused."

"Will you come?" said Aldous to Marcella. What she chose to think the forced patience of his tone exasperated her.

"I will do everything I can," she said in a low, distinct voice to Wharton. "Good-bye."

She held out her hand. To both the moment was one of infinite meaning; to her, in her high spiritual excitement, a sacrament of pardon and gratitude — expressed once for all — by this touch — in Aldous Raeburn's presence.

The two men nodded to each other. Wharton was already busy, putting his papers together.

"We shall meet next week, I suppose, in the House?" said Wharton, casually. "Good-night."

"Will you take me to the Court?" said Marcella to Aldous, directly the door of the carriage was shut upon them, and, amid a gaping crowd that almost filled the little market-place of Widrington, the horses moved off. "I told mamma, that, if I did

not come home, I should be with you, and that I should ask you to send me back from the Court to-night."

She still held the packet Wharton had given her in her hand. As though for air, she had thrown back the black gauze veil she had worn all through the trial, and, as they passed through the lights of the town, Aldous could see in her face the signs — the plain, startling signs — of the effect of these weeks upon her. Pale, exhausted, yet showing in every movement the nervous excitement which was driving her on — his heart sank as he looked at her — foreseeing what was to come.

As soon as the main street had been left behind, he put his head out of the window, and gave the coachman, who had been told to go to Mellor, the new order.

"Will you mind if I don't talk?" said Marcella, when he was again beside her. "I think I am tired out, but I might rest now a little. When we get to the Court, will you ask Miss Raeburn to let me have some food in her sitting-room? Then, at nine o'clock or so, may I come down and see Lord Maxwell and you — together?"

What she said, and the manner in which she said it, could only add to his uneasiness; but he assented, put a cushion behind her, wrapped the rugs round her, and then sat silent, train after train of close and anxious thought passing through his mind as they rolled along the dark roads.

When they arrived at Maxwell Court, the sound of the carriage brought Lord Maxwell and Miss Raeburn at once into the hall.

Aldous went forward in front of Marcella. "I have brought Marcella," he said hastily to his aunt. "Will you take her upstairs to your sitting-room, and let her have some food and rest? She is not fit for the exertion of dinner, but she wishes to speak to my grandfather afterwards."

Lord Maxwell had already hurried to meet the black-veiled figure standing proudly in the dim light of the outer hall.

"My dear! my dear!" he said, drawing her arm within his, and patting her hand in fatherly fashion. "How worn-out you look! — Yes, certainly — Agneta, take her up and let her rest — And you wish to speak to me afterwards? Of course, my dear, of course — at any time."

Miss Raeburn, controlling herself absolutely, partly because of Aldous's manner, partly because of the servants, took her guest upstairs straightway, put her on the sofa in a cheerful sitting-room with a bright fire, and then, shrewdly guessing that she herself could not possibly be a congenial companion to the girl at such a moment, whatever might have happened or might be going to happen, she looked at her watch, said that she must go down to dinner, and promptly left her to the charge of a kind elderly maid, who was to do and get for her whatever she would.

Marcella made herself swallow some food and wine. Then she said that she wished to be alone and rest for an hour, and would come downstairs at nine o'clock. The maid, shocked by her pallor, was loth to leave her, but Marcella insisted.

When she was left alone she drew herself up to the

fire and tried hard to get warm, as she had tried to eat. When in this way a portion of physical ease and strength had come back to her, she took out the petition from its envelope and read it carefully. As she did so her lip relaxed, her eye recovered something of its brightness. All the points that had occurred to her confusedly, amateurishly, throughout the day, were here thrown into luminous and admirable form. She had listened to them indeed, as urged by Wharton in his concluding speech to the jury, but it had not, alas! seemed so marvellous to her then, as it did now, that, *after* such a plea, the judge should have summed up as he did.

When she had finished it and had sat thinking awhile over the declining fire, an idea struck her. She took a piece of paper from Miss Raeburn's desk, and wrote on it:

"Will you read this — and Lord Maxwell — before I come down? I forgot that you had not seen it. — M."

A ring at the bell brought the maid.

"Will you please get this taken to Mr. Raeburn? And then, don't disturb me again for half an hour."

And for that time she lay in Miss Raeburn's favourite chair, outwardly at rest. Inwardly she was ranging all her arguments, marshalling all her forces.

When the chiming clock in the great hall below struck nine, she got up and put the lamp for a moment on the mantelpiece, which held a mirror. She had already bathed her face and smoothed her hair. But she looked at herself again with attention, drew down the thick front waves of hair a little lower on the

white brow, as she liked to have them, and once more straightened the collar and cuffs which were the only relief to her plain black dress.

The house as she stepped out into it seemed very still. Perfumed breaths of flowers and pot-pourri ascended from the hall. The pictures along the walls as she passed were those same Caroline and early Georgian beauties that had so flashingly suggested her own future rule in this domain on the day when Aldous proposed to her.

She felt suddenly very shrinking and lonely as she went downstairs. The ticking of a large clock somewhere — the short, screaming note of Miss Raeburn's parrot in one of the ground-floor rooms — these sounds and the beating of her own heart seemed to have the vast house to themselves.

No! — that was a door opening — Aldous coming to fetch her. She drew a childish breath of comfort.

He sprang up the stairs, two or three steps at a time, as he saw her coming.

"Are you rested — were they good to you? Oh! my precious one! — how pale you are still! Will you come and see my grandfather now? He is quite ready."

She let him lead her in. Lord Maxwell was standing by his writing-table, leaning over the petition which was open before him — one hand upon it. At sight of her he lifted his white head. His fine aquiline face was grave and disturbed. But nothing could have been kinder or more courtly than his manner as he came towards her.

"Sit down in that chair. Aldous, make her com-

fortable. Poor child, how tired she looks! I hear you wished to speak to me on this most unhappy, most miserable business."

Marcella, who was sitting erect on the edge of the chair into which Aldous had put her, lifted her eyes with a sudden confidence. She had always liked Lord Maxwell.

"Yes," she said, struggling to keep down eagerness and emotion. "Yes, I came to bring you this petition, which is to be sent up to the Home Secretary on behalf of Jim Hurd, and — and — to *beg* of you and Aldous to sign it, if in any way you can. I know it will be difficult, but I thought I might — I might be able to suggest something to you — to convince you — as I have known these people so well — and it is very important to have your signatures."

How crude it sounded — how mechanical! She felt that she had not yet command of herself. The strange place, the stately room, the consciousness of Aldous behind her — Aldous, who should have been on her side and was not — all combined to intimidate her.

Lord Maxwell's concern was evident. In the first place, he was painfully, unexpectedly struck by the change in the speaker. Why, what had Aldous been about? So thin! so frail and willowy in her black dress — monstrous!

"My dear," he said, walking up to her and laying a fatherly hand on her shoulder, "my dear, I wish I could make you understand how gladly I would do this, or anything else, for you, if I honourably could. I would do it for your sake and for your grandfather's sake. But — this is a matter of conscience, of public

duty, both for Aldous and myself. You will not surely *wish* even, that we should be governed in our relations to it by any private feeling or motive?"

"No, but I have had no opportunity of speaking to you about it — and I take such a different view from Aldous. He knows — everybody must know — that there is another side, another possible view from that which the judge took. You weren't in court to-day, were you, at all?"

"No. But I read all the evidence before the magistrates with great care, and I have just talked over the crucial points with Aldous, who followed everything to-day, as you know, and seems to have taken special note of Mr. Wharton's speeches."

"Aldous!" — her voice broke irrepressibly into another note — "I thought he would have let me speak to you first! — to-night!"

Lord Maxwell, looking quickly at his grandson, was very sorry for him. Aldous bent over her chair.

"You remember," he said, "you sent down the petition. I thought that meant that we were to read and discuss it. I am very sorry."

She tried to command herself, pressing her hand to her brow. But already she felt the irrevocable, and anger and despair were rising.

"The whole point lies in this," she said, looking up: "*Can* we believe Hurd's own story? There is no evidence to corroborate it. I grant that — the judge did not believe it — and there is the evidence of hatred. But is it not possible and conceivable all the same? He says that he did not go out with any thought whatever of killing Westall, but that when

Westall came upon him with his stick up, threatening and abusing him, as he had done often before, in a fit of wild rage he shot at him. Surely, *surely* that is conceivable? There *is* — there *must* be a doubt; or, if it is murder, murder done in that way is quite, quite different from other kinds and degrees of murder."

Now she possessed herself. The gift of flowing persuasive speech which was naturally hers, which the agitations, the debates of these weeks had been maturing, came to her call. She leant forward and took up the petition. One by one she went through its pleas, adding to them here and there from her own knowledge of Hurd and his peasant's life — presenting it all clearly, with great intellectual force, but in an atmosphere of emotion, of high pity, charged throughout with the "tears of things." To her, gradually, unconsciously, the whole matter — so sordid, commonplace, brutal in Lord Maxwell's eyes! — had become a tragic poem, a thing of fear and pity, to which her whole being vibrated. And as she conceived it, so she reproduced it. Wharton's points were there indeed, but so were Hurd's poverty, Hurd's deformity, Hurd as the boyish victim of a tyrant's insults, the miserable wife, the branded children — emphasised, all of them, by the occasional quiver, quickly steadied again, of the girl's voice.

Lord Maxwell sat by his writing-table, his head resting on his hand, one knee crossed over the other. Aldous still hung over her chair. Neither interrupted her. Once the eyes of the two men met over her head — a distressed, significant look. Aldous heard

all she said, but what absorbed him mainly was the wild desire to kiss the dark hair, so close below him, alternating with the miserable certainty that for him at that moment to touch, to soothe her, was to be repulsed.

When her voice broke — when she had said all she could think of — she remained looking imploringly at Lord Maxwell.

He was silent a little; then he stooped forward and took her hand.

"You have spoken," he said with great feeling, "most nobly — most well — like a good woman, with a true compassionate heart. But all these things you have said are not new to me, my dear child. Aldous warned me of this petition — he has pressed upon me, still more I am sure upon himself, all that he conceived to be your view of the case — the view of those who are now moving in the matter. But with the best will in the world I cannot, and I believe that he cannot — though he must speak for himself — I cannot take that view. In my belief Hurd's act was murder, and deserves the penalty of murder. I have paid some attention to these things. I was a practising barrister in my youth, and later I was for two years Home Secretary. I will explain to you my grounds very shortly."

And, bending forward, he gave the reasons for his judgment of the case as carefully and as lucidly as though he were stating them to a fellow-expert, and not to an agitated girl of twenty-one. Both in words and manner there was an implied tribute, not only to Marcella, but perhaps to that altered position

of the woman in our moving world which affects so many things and persons in unexpected ways.

Marcella listened, restlessly. She had drawn her hand away, and was twisting her handkerchief between her fingers. The flush that had sprung up while she was talking had died away. She grew whiter and whiter. When Lord Maxwell ceased, she said quickly, and as he thought unreasonably —

"So you will not sign?"

"No," he replied firmly, "I cannot sign. Holding the conviction about the matter I do, I should be giving my name to statements I do not believe; and in order to give myself the pleasure of pleasing you, and of indulging the pity that every man must feel for every murderer's wife and children, I should be not only committing a public wrong, but I should be doing what I could to lessen the safety and security of one whole class of my servants — men who give me honourable service — and two of whom have been so cruelly, so wantonly hurried before their Maker!"

His voice gave the first sign of his own deep and painful feeling on the matter. Marcella shivered.

"Then," she said slowly, "Hurd will be executed."

Lord Maxwell had a movement of impatience.

"Let me tell you," he said, "that that does not follow at all. There is *some* importance in signatures — or rather in the local movement that the signatures imply. It enables a case to be reopened, which, in any event, this case is sure to be. But any Home Secretary who could decide a murder case on any other grounds whatever than those of law and his own conscience would not deserve his place a day — an

hour! Believe me, you mistake the whole situation."

He spoke slowly, with the sharp emphasis natural to his age and authority. Marcella did not believe him. Every nerve was beginning to throb anew with that passionate recoil against tyranny and prejudice, which was in itself an agony.

"And you say the same?" she said, turning to Aldous.

"I cannot sign that petition," he said sadly. "Won't you try and believe what it costs me to refuse?"

It was a heavy blow to her. Amply as she had been prepared for it, there had always been at the bottom of her mind a persuasion that in the end she would get her way. She had been used to feel barriers go down before that ultimate power of personality of which she was abundantly conscious. Yet it had not availed her here — not even with the man who loved her.

Lord Maxwell looked at the two — the man's face of suffering, the girl's struggling breath.

"There, there, Aldous!" he said, rising. "I will leave you a minute. Do make Marcella rest — get her, for all our sakes, to forget this a little. Bring her in presently to us for some coffee. Above all, persuade her that we love her and admire her with all our hearts, but that in a matter of this kind she must leave us to do—as before God!—what we think right."

He stood before her an instant, gazing down upon her with dignity — nay, a certain severity. Then he turned away and left the room.

Marcella sprang up.

"Will you order the carriage?" she said in a strangled voice. "I will go upstairs."

"Marcella!" cried Aldous; "can you not be just to me, if it is impossible for you to be generous?"

"Just!" she repeated, with a tone and gesture of repulsion, pushing him back from her. "*You* can talk of justice!"

He tried to speak, stammered, and failed. That strange paralysis of the will-forces which dogs the man of reflection at the moment when he must either take his world by storm or lose it was upon him now. He had never loved her more passionately — but as he stood there looking at her, something broke within him, the first prescience of the inevitable dawned.

"*You,*" she said again, walking stormily to and fro, and catching at her breath — "*You,* in this house, with this life — to talk of justice — the justice that comes of slaying a man like Hurd! And I must go back to that cottage, to that woman, and tell her there is *no* hope — none! Because *you* must follow your conscience — you who have everything! Oh! I would not have your conscience — I wish you a heart — rather! Don't come to me, please! Oh! I must think how it can be. Things cannot go on so. I should kill myself, and make you miserable. But now I must go to *her* — to the *poor* — to those whom I *love,* whom I carry in my heart!"

She broke off sobbing. He saw her, in her wild excitement, look round the splendid room as though she would wither it to ruin with one fiery, accusing glance.

"You are very scornful of wealth," he said, catching her wrists, "but one thing you have no right to scorn! — the man who has given you his inmost heart — and now only asks you to believe in this, that he is not the cruel hypocrite you are determined to make him!"

His face quivered in every feature. She was checked a moment — checked by the moral compulsion of his tone and manner, as well as by his words. But again she tore herself away.

"*Please* go and order the carriage," she said. "I cannot bear any more. I *must* go home and rest. Some day I will ask your pardon — oh! for this — and — and — " she was almost choked again — "other things. But now I must go away. There is some one who will help me. I must not forget that!"

The reckless words, the inflection, turned Aldous to stone. Unconsciously he drew himself proudly erect — their eyes met. Then he went up to the bell and rang it.

"The brougham at once, for Miss Boyce. Will you have a maid to go with you?" he asked, motioning the servant to stay till Miss Boyce had given her answer.

"No, thank you. I must go and put on my things. Will you explain to Miss Raeburn?"

The footman opened the door for her. She went.

CHAPTER XIV.

"But this is unbearable!" said Aldous. "Do you mean to say that she is at home and that she will not see me?"

Mrs. Boyce's self-possession was shaken for once by the flushed humiliation of the man before her.

"I am afraid it is so," she said hurriedly. "I remonstrated with Marcella, but I could do nothing. I think, if you are wise, you will not for the present attempt to see her."

Aldous sat down, with his hat in his hand, staring at the floor. After a few moments' silence he looked up again.

"And she gave you no message for me?"

"No," said Mrs. Boyce, reluctantly. "Only that she could not bear to see anybody from the Court, even you, while this matter was still undecided."

Aldous's eye travelled round the Mellor drawing-room. It was arrested by a chair beside him. On it lay an envelope addressed to Miss Boyce, of which the handwriting seemed to him familiar. A needle with some black silk hanging from it had been thrust into the stuffed arm of the chair; the cushion at the back still bore the imprint of the sitter. She had been there, not three minutes ago, and had fled be-

fore him. The door into Mrs. Boyce's sitting-room was still ajar.

He looked again at the envelope on the chair, and recognised the writing. Walking across to where Mrs. Boyce sat, he took a seat beside her.

"Will you tell me," he said steadily — "I think you will admit I have a right to know — is Marcella in constant correspondence now with Henry Wharton?"

Mrs. Boyce's start was not perceptible.

"I believe so," she quickly replied. "So far as I can judge, he writes to her almost every other day."

"Does she show you his letters?"

"Very often. They are entirely concerned with his daily interviews and efforts on Hurd's behalf."

"Would you not say," he asked, after another pause, raising his clear grey eyes to her, "that since his arrival here in December Marcella's whole views and thoughts have been largely — perhaps vitally — influenced by this man?"

Mrs. Boyce had long expected questions of this kind — had, indeed, often marvelled and cavilled that Aldous had not asked them weeks before. Now that they were put to her she was, first of all, anxious to treat them with common sense, and as much plain truth as might be fair to both parties. The perpetual emotion in which Marcella lived tired and oppressed the mother. For herself she asked to see things in a dry light. Yet she knew well that the moment was critical. Her feeling was more mixed than it had been. On the whole it was indignantly on Aldous's side — with qualifications and impatiences, however.

She took up her embroidery again before she answered him. In her opinion the needle is to the woman what the cigarette is to the diplomatist.

"Yes, certainly," she said at last. "He has done a great deal to form her opinions. He has made her both read and think on all those subjects she has so long been fond of talking about."

She saw Aldous wince; but she had her reasons for being plain with him.

"Has there been nothing else than that in it?" said Aldous, in an odd voice.

Mrs. Boyce tried no evasions. She looked at him straight, her slight, energetic head, with its pale gold hair lit up by the March sun behind her.

"I do not know," she said calmly; "that is the real truth. I *think* there is nothing else. But let me tell you what more I think."

Aldous laid his hand on hers for an instant. In his pity and liking for her he had once or twice allowed himself this quasi-filial freedom.

"If you would," he entreated.

"Leave Marcella quite alone — for the present. She is not herself — not normal, in any way. Nor will she be till this dreadful thing is over. But when it is over, and she has had time to recover a little, *then*" — her thin voice expressed all the emphasis it could — "*then* assert yourself! Ask her that question you have asked me — and get your answer."

He understood. Her advice to him, and the tone of it, implied that she had not always thought highly of his powers of self-defence in the past. But there was a proud and sensitive instinct in him which both

told him that he could not have done differently and forbade him to explain.

"You have come from London to-day?" said Mrs. Boyce, changing the subject. All intimate and personal conversation was distasteful to her, and she admitted few responsibilities. Her daughter hardly counted among them.

"Yes; London is hard at work cabinet-making," he said, trying to smile. "I must get back to-night."

"I don't know how you could be spared," said Mrs. Boyce.

He paused; then he broke out: "When a man is in the doubt and trouble I am, he must be spared. Indeed, since the night of the trial, I feel as though I had been of very little use to any human being."

He spoke simply, but every word touched her. What an inconceivable entanglement the whole thing was! Yet she was no longer merely contemptuous of it.

"Look!" she said, lifting a bit of black stuff from the ground beside the chair which held the envelope; "she is already making the mourning for the children. I can see she despairs."

He made a sound of horror.

"Can you do nothing?" he cried reproachfully. "To think of her dwelling upon this — nothing but this, day and night — and I, banished and powerless!"

He buried his head in his hands.

"No, I can do nothing," said Mrs. Boyce, deliberately. Then, after a pause, "You do not imagine there is any chance of success for her?"

He looked up and shook his head.

"The Radical papers are full of it, as you know. Wharton is managing it with great ability, and has got some good supporters in the House. But I happened to see the judge the day before yesterday, and I certainly gathered from him that the Home Office was likely to stand firm. There may be some delay. The new ministry will not kiss hands till Saturday. But no doubt it will be the first business of the new Home Secretary. — By the way, I had rather Marcella did not hear of my seeing Judge Cartwright," he added hastily — almost imploringly. "I could not bear that she should suppose — "

Mrs. Boyce thought to herself indignantly that she never could have imagined such a man in such a plight.

"I must go," he said, rising. "Will you tell her from me," he added slowly, "that I could never have believed she would be so unkind as to let me come down from London to see her, and send me away empty — without a word?"

"Leave it to my discretion," said Mrs. Boyce, smiling and looking up. "Oh, by the way, she told me to thank you. Mr. Wharton, in his letter this morning, mentioned that you had given him two introductions which were important to him. She specially wished you to be thanked for it."

His exclamation had a note of impatient contempt that Mrs. Boyce was genuinely glad to hear. In her opinion he was much too apt to forget that the world yields itself only to the "violent."

He walked away from the house without once looking back. Marcella, from her window, watched him go.

"How *could* she see him?" she asked herself passionately, both then and on many other occasions during these rushing, ghastly days. His turn would come, and it should be amply given him. But *now* the very thought of that half-hour in Lord Maxwell's library threw her into wild tears. The time for entreaty — for argument — was gone by, so far as he was concerned. He might have been her champion, and would not. She threw herself recklessly, madly into the encouragement and support of the man who had taken up the task which, in her eyes, should have been her lover's. It had become to her a *fight* — with society, with the law, with Aldous — in which her whole nature was absorbed. In the course of the fight she had realised Aldous's strength, and it was a bitter offence to her.

How little she could do after all! She gathered together all the newspapers that were debating the case, and feverishly read every line; she wrote to Wharton, commenting on what she read, and on his letters; she attended the meetings of the Reprieve Committee which had been started at Widrington; and she passed hours of every day with Minta Hurd and her children. She would hardly speak to Mary Harden and the rector, because they had not signed the petition, and at home her relations with her father were much strained. Mr. Boyce was awakening to a good deal of alarm as to how things might end. He might not like the Raeburns, but that anything should come in the way of his daughter's match was, notwithstanding, the very last thing in the world, as he soon discovered, that he really desired.

During six months he had taken it for granted; so had the county. He, of all men, could not afford to be made ridiculous, apart from the solid, the extraordinary advantages of the matter. He thought Marcella a foolish, unreasonable girl, and was not the less in a panic because his wife let him understand that he had had a good deal to do with it. So that between him and his daughter there were now constant sparrings — sparrings which degraded Marcella in her own eyes, and contributed not a little to make her keep away from home.

The one place where she breathed freely, where the soul had full course, was in Minta Hurd's kitchen. Side by side with that piteous plaintive misery, her own fierceness dwindled. She would sit with little Willie on her knees in the dusk of the spring evenings, looking into the fire, and crying silently. She never suspected that her presence was often a burden and constraint, not only to the sulky sister-in-law but to the wife herself. While Miss Boyce was there the village kept away; and Mrs. Hurd was sometimes athirst, without knowing it, for homelier speech and simpler consolations than any Marcella could give her.

The last week arrived. Wharton's letters grew more uncertain and despondent; the Radical press fought on with added heat as the cause became more desperate. On Monday the wife went to see the condemned man, who told her not to be so silly as to imagine there was any hope. Tuesday night, Wharton asked his last question in Parliament. Friday was the day fixed for the execution.

The question in Parliament came on late. The Home Secretary's answer, though not final in form, was final in substance. Wharton went out immediately and wrote to Marcella. "She will not sleep if I telegraph to-night," he thought, with that instinct for detail, especially for physical detail, which had in it something of the woman. But, knowing that his letter could not reach her by the early post with the stroke of eight next morning, he sent out his telegram, that she might not learn the news first from the papers.

Marcella had wandered out before breakfast, feeling the house an oppression, and knowing that, one way or another, the last news might reach her any hour.

She had just passed through the little wood behind and alongside of the house, and was in a field beyond, when she heard some one running behind her. William handed her the telegram, his own red face full of understanding. Marcella took it, commanded herself till the boy was out of sight and hearing again, then sank down on the grass to read it.

"All over. The Home Secretary's official refusal to interfere with sentence sent to Widrington to-day. Accept my sorrow and sympathy."

She crushed it in her hand, raising her head mechanically. Before her lay that same shallow cup of ploughed land stretching from her father's big wood to the downs, on the edge of which Hurd had plied his ferrets in the winter nights. But to-day the spring worked in it, and breathed upon it. The young corn was already green in the furrows; the hazel-catkins quivered in the hedge above her; larks

were in the air, daisies in the grass, and the march of sunny clouds could be seen in the flying shadows they flung on the pale greens and sheeny purples of the wide treeless basin.

Human helplessness, human agony — set against the careless joy of nature — there is no new way of feeling these things. But not to have felt them, and with the mad, impotent passion and outcry which filled Marcella's heart at this moment, is never to have risen to the full stature of our kind.

"Marcella, it is my strong wish — my command — that you do *not* go out to the village to-night."

"I must go, papa."

It was Thursday night — the night before the Friday morning fixed for Hurd's execution. Dinner at Mellor was just over. Mr. Boyce, who was standing in front of the fire, unconsciously making the most of his own inadequate height and size, looked angrily at his stately daughter. She had not appeared at dinner, and she was now dressed in the long black cloak and black hat she had worn so constantly in the last few weeks. Mr. Boyce detested the garb.

"You are making yourself *ridiculous*, Marcella. Pity for these wretched people is all very well, but you have no business to carry it to such a point that you — and we — become the talk, the laughing-stock of the county. And I should like to see you, too, pay some attention to Aldous Raeburn's feelings and wishes."

The admonition, in her father's mouth, would almost have made her laugh, if she could have

laughed at anything. But, instead, she only repeated:

"I must go, I have explained to mamma."

"Evelyn! why do you permit it?" cried Mr. Boyce, turning aggressively to his wife.

"Marcella explained to me, as she truly said," replied Mrs. Boyce, looking up calmly. "It is not her habit to ask permission of any one."

"Mamma," exclaimed the girl, in her deep voice, "you would not wish to stop me?"

"No," said Mrs. Boyce, after a pause, "no. You have gone so far, I understand your wish to do this. Richard," — she got up and went to him, — "don't excite yourself about it; shall I read to you, or play a game with you?"

He looked at her, trembling with anger. But her quiet eye warned him that he had had threatenings of pain that afternoon. His anger sank into fear. He became once more irritable and abject.

"Let her gang her gait," he said, throwing himself into a chair. "But I tell you I shall not put up with this kind of thing much longer, Marcella."

"I shall not ask you, papa," she said steadily, as she moved towards the door. Mrs. Boyce paused where she stood, and looked after her daughter, struck by her words. Mr. Boyce simply took them as referring to the marriage which would emancipate her before long from any control of his, and fumed, without finding a reply.

The maid-servant who, by Mrs. Boyce's orders, was to accompany Marcella to the village, was already at the front door. She carried a basket con-

taining invalid food for little Willie, and a lighted lantern.

It was a dark night and raining fast. Marcella was fastening up her tweed skirt in the hall, when she saw Mrs. Boyce hurry along the gallery above, and immediately afterwards her mother came across the hall to her.

"You had better take the shawl, Marcella: it is cold and raw. If you are going to sit up most of the night you will want it."

She put a wrap of her own across Marcella's arm.

"Your father is quite right," she went on. "You have had one horrible experience to-day already — "

"Don't, mamma!" exclaimed Marcella, interrupting her. Then suddenly she threw her arms round her mother.

"Kiss me, mamma! please kiss me!"

Mrs. Boyce kissed her gravely, and let herself even linger a moment in the girl's strong hold.

"You are extraordinarily wilful," she said. "And it is so strange to me that you think you do any good. Are you sure even that she wants to have you?"

Marcella's lip quivered. She could not speak, apparently. Waving her hand to her mother, she joined the maid waiting for her, and the two disappeared into the blackness.

"But *does* it do any good?" Mrs. Boyce repeated to herself as she went back to the drawing-room. "*Sympathy!* who was ever yet fed, warmed, comforted by *sympathy?* Marcella robs that woman of the only thing that the human being should want at such a

moment — solitude. Why should we force on the poor what to us would be an outrage?"

Meanwhile Marcella battled through the wind and rain, thankful that the warm spring burst was over, and that the skies no longer mocked this horror which was beneath them.

At the entrance to the village she stopped, and took the basket from the little maid.

"Now, Ruth, you can go home. Run quick, it is so dark, Ruth!"

"Yes, miss."

The young country girl trembled. Miss Boyce's tragic passion in this matter had to some extent infected the whole household in which she lived.

"Ruth, when you say your prayers to-night, pray God to comfort the poor,— and to punish the cruel!"

"Yes, miss," said the girl, timidly, and ready to cry. The lantern she held flashed its light on Miss Boyce's white face and tall form. Till her mistress turned away she did not dare to move; that dark eye, so wide, full, and living, roused in her a kind of terror.

On the steps of the cottage Marcella paused. She heard voices inside — or rather the rector's voice reading.

A thought of scorn rose in her heart. "How long will the poor endure this religion — this make-believe — which preaches patience, *patience!* when it ought to be urging war?"

But she went in softly, so as not to interrupt. The rector looked up and made a grave sign of the head as she entered; her own gesture forbade any other

movement in the group; she took a stool beside Willie, whose makeshift bed of chairs and pillows stood on one side of the fire; and the reading went on.

Since Minta Hurd had returned with Marcella from Widrington Gaol that afternoon, she had been so ill that a doctor had been sent for. He had bade them make up her bed downstairs in the warm; and accordingly a mattress had been laid on the settle, and she was now stretched upon it. Her huddled form, the staring whiteness of the narrow face and closed eyelids, thrown out against the dark oak of the settle, and the disordered mass of grizzled hair, made the centre of the cottage.

Beside her on the floor sat Mary Harden, her head bowed over the rough hand she held, her eyes red with weeping. Fronting them, beside a little table, which held a small paraffin lamp, sat the young rector, his Testament in his hand, his slight boy's figure cast in sharp shadow on the cottage wall. He had placed himself so as to screen the crude light of the lamp from the wife's eyes; and an old skirt had been hung over a chair to keep it from little Willie. Between mother and child sat Ann Mullins, rocking herself to and fro over the fire, and groaning from time to time — a shapeless sullen creature, brutalised by many children and much poverty — of whom Marcella was often impatient.

"*And he said, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom. And He said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.*"

The rector's voice, in its awed monotony, dwelt

insistently on each word, then paused. "*To-day,*" whispered Mary, caressing Minta's hand, while the tears streamed down her cheeks; "he repented, Minta, and the Lord took him to Himself — at once — forgiving all his sins."

Mrs. Hurd gave no sign, but the dark figure on the other side of the cottage made an involuntary movement, which threw down a fire-iron, and sent a start through Willie's wasted body. The reader resumed; but perfect spontaneity was somehow lost both for him and for Mary. Marcella's stormy presence worked in them both, like a troubling leaven.

Nevertheless, the priest went steadily through his duty, dwelling on every pang of the Passion, putting together every sacred and sublime word. For centuries on centuries his brethren and forerunners had held up the Man of Sorrows before the anguished and the dying; his turn had come, his moment and place in the marvellous never-ending task; he accepted it with the meek ardour of an undoubting faith.

"*And all the multitudes that came together to this sight, when they beheld the things that were done, returned, smiting their breasts.*"

He closed the book, and bent forward, so as to bring his voice close to the wife's ear.

"So He died — the Sinless and the Just — for you, for your husband. He has passed through death — through cruel death; and where He has gone, we poor, weak, stained sinners can follow, — holding to Him. No sin, however black, can divide us from Him, can tear us from His hand in the dark waters, if it be only repented, — thrown upon His Cross. Let us

pray for your husband, let us implore the Lord's mercy this night — this hour! — upon his soul."

A shudder of remembrance passed through Marcella. The rector knelt; Mrs. Hurd lay motionless, save for deep gasps of struggling breath at intervals; Ann Mullins sobbed loudly; and Mary Harden wept as she prayed, lost in a mystical vision of the Lord Himself among them — there on the cottage floor — stretching hands of pity over the woman beside her, showing His marred side and brow.

Marcella alone sat erect, her whole being one passionate protest against a faith which could thus heap all the crimes and responsibilities of this too real earth on the shadowy head of one far-off Redeemer. "This very man who prays," she thought, "is in some sort an accomplice of those who, after tempting, are now destroying, and killing, because they know of nothing better to do with the life they themselves have made outcast."

And she hardened her heart.

When the spoken prayer was over, Mr. Harden still knelt on silently for some minutes. So did Mary. In the midst of the hush, Marcella saw the boy's eyes unclose. He looked with a sort of remote wonder at his mother and the figures beside her. Then suddenly the gaze became eager, concrete; he sought for something. Her eye followed his, and she perceived in the shadow beside him, on a broken chair placed behind the rough screen which had been made for him, the four tiny animals of pinched paper Wharton had once fashioned. She stooped noiselessly and moved the chair a little forward that he might see

them better. The child with difficulty turned his wasted head, and lay with his skeleton hand under his cheek, staring at his treasures — his little all — with just a gleam, a faint gleam, of that same exquisite content which had fascinated Wharton. Then, for the first time that day, Marcella could have wept.

At last the rector and his sister rose.

"God be with you, Mrs. Hurd," said Mr. Harden, stooping to her; "God support you!"

His voice trembled. Mrs. Hurd in bewilderment looked up.

"Oh, Mr. Harden!" she cried with a sudden wail. "Mr. Harden!"

Mary bent over her with tears, trying to still her, speaking again with quivering lips of "the dear Lord, the Saviour."

The rector turned to Marcella.

"You are staying the night with her?" he asked, under his breath.

"Yes. Mrs. Mullins was up all last night. I offered to come to-night."

"You went with her to the prison to-day, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Hurd?"

"For a very few minutes."

"Did you hear anything of his state of mind?" he asked anxiously. "Is he penitent?"

"He talked to me of Willie," she said — a fierce humanness in her unfriendly eyes. "I promised him that when the child died, he should be buried respectably — not by the parish. And I told him I would always look after the little girls."

The rector sighed. He moved away. Then unexpectedly he came back again.

"I must say it to you," he said firmly, but still so low as not to be heard by any one else in the cottage. "You are taking a great responsibility here to-night. Let me implore you not to fill that poor woman with thoughts of bitterness and revenge at such a moment of her life. That *you* feel bitterly, I know. Mary has explained to me — but ask yourself, I beg of you! — how is *she* to be helped through her misery, either now or in the future, except by patience and submission to the will of God?"

He had never made so long a speech to this formidable parishioner of his, and his young cheek glowed with the effort.

"You must leave me to do what I think best," said Marcella, coldly. She felt herself wholly set free from that sort of moral compulsion which his holiness of mind and character had once exerted upon her. That hateful opinion of his, which Mary had reported, had broken the spell once for all.

Mary did not venture to kiss her friend. They all went. Ann Mullins, who was dropping as much with sleep as grief, shuffled off last. When she was going, Mrs. Hurd seemed to rouse a little, and held her by the skirt, saying incoherent things.

"Dear Mrs. Hurd," said Marcella, kneeling down beside her, "won't you let Ann go? I am going to spend the night here, and take care of you and Willie."

Mrs. Hurd gave a painful start.

"You're very good, miss," she said half-consciously, "very good, I'm sure. But she's his own flesh and blood is Ann — his own flesh and blood. Ann!"

The two women clung together, the rough, ill-tempered sister-in-law muttering what soothing she could think of. When she was gone, Minta Hurd turned her face to the back of the settle and moaned, her hands clenched under her breast.

Marcella went about her preparations for the night. "She is extremely weak," Dr. Clarke had said; "the heart in such a state she may die of syncope on very small provocation. If she is to spend the night in crying and exciting herself, it will go hard with her. Get her to sleep if you possibly can."

And he had left a sleeping draught. Marcella resolved that she would persuade her to take it. "But I will wake her before eight o'clock," she thought. "No human being has the right to rob her of herself through that last hour."

And tenderly she coaxed Minta to take the doctor's "medicine." Minta swallowed it submissively, asking no questions. But the act of taking it roused her for the time, and she would talk. She even got up and tottered across to Willie.

"Willie! — Willie! — Oh! look, miss, he's got his animals — he don't think of nothing else. Oh, Willie! won't you think of your father? — you'll never have a father, Willie, not after to-night!"

The boy was startled by her appearance there beside him — his haggard, dishevelled mother, with the dews of perspiration standing on the face, and her black dress thrown open at the throat and breast for air. He looked at her, and a little frown lined the white brow. But he did not speak. Marcella thought he was too weak to speak, and for an instant it struck

her with a thrill of girlish fear that he was c
and there — that night — that hour. But
had half helped, half forced Mrs. Hurd ba
again, and had returned to him, his eyelids l
he seemed asleep. The fast, whistling b
much the same as it had been for days; she
herself.

And at last the wife slept too. The narc
her. The aching limbs relaxed, and all
Marcella, stooping over her, kissed the sl
her dress for very joy, so grateful to ever
the watcher was the sudden lull in the lon
of anguish.

Then she sat down in the rocking chair b
yielding herself with a momentary relief tc
and the silence. The tall clock showed t
not yet ten. She had brought a book witl
she drew it upon her knee; but it lay unop

A fretting, gusty wind beat against the
with occasional rushes of rain. Marcella
though she had built up the fire, and p
cloak.

A few distant sounds from the village st
the corner, the chiming of the church
crackling of the fire close beside her —
everything there was to hear, with unusual
of ear, and imagined more.

All at once restlessness, or some undefine
sion, made her look round her. She sav
scanty baize curtain was only half-drawn
of the windows, and she got up to close
from the light of the lamp, she stared th

panes into the night without at first seeing anything. Then there flashed out upon the dark the door of a public-house to the right, the last in the village road. A man came out stumbling and reeling; the light within streamed out an instant on the road and the common; then the pursuing rain and darkness fell upon him.

She was drawing back when, with sudden horror, she perceived something else close beside her, pressing against the window. A woman's face! — the powerful black and white of it — the strong aquiline features — the mad keenness of the look were all plain to her. The eyes looked in hungrily at the prostrate form on the settle — at the sleeping child. Another figure appeared out of the dark, running up the path. There was a slight scuffle, and voices outside. Marcella drew the curtain close with a hasty hand, and sat down hardly able to breathe. The woman who had looked in was Isabella Westall. It was said that she was becoming more and more difficult to manage and to watch.

Marcella was some time in recovering herself. That look, as of a sleepless, hateful eagerness, clung to the memory. Once or twice, as it haunted her, she got up again to make sure that the door was fast.

The incident, with all it suggested, did but intensify the horror and struggle in which the girl stood, made her mood more strained, more piercingly awake and alert. Gradually, as the hours passed, as all sounds from without, even that of the wind, died away, and the silence settled round her in ever-widening circles,

like deep waters sinking to repose, Marcella felt herself a naked soul, alone on a wide sea, with shapes of pain and agony and revolt. She looked at the sleeping wife. "He, too, is probably asleep," she thought, remembering some information which a kindly warder had given her in a few jerky, well-meant sentences, while she was waiting downstairs in the gaol for Minta Hurd. "Incredible! only so many hours, minutes left — so far as any mortal *knows* — of living, thinking, recollecting, of all that makes us something as against the *nothing* of death — and a man wastes them in sleep, in that which is only meant for the ease and repair of the daily struggle. And Minta — her husband is her all — to-morrow she will have no husband; yet she sleeps, and I have helped to make her. Ah! Nature may well despise and trample on us; there is no reason in us — no dignity! Oh, why are we here — why am *I* here — to ache like this — to hate good people like Charles Harden and Mary — to refuse all I could give — to madden myself over pain I can never help? I cannot help it, yet I cannot forsake it; it drives, it clings to me!"

She sat over the fire, Willie's hand clasped in hers. He alone in this forlorn household *loved* her. Mrs. Hurd and the other children feared and depended on her. This creature of thistle-down — this little thread and patch of humanity — felt no fear of her. It was as though his weakness divined through her harshness and unripeness those maternal and protecting powers with which her nature was in truth so richly dowered. He confided himself to her with no misgivings. He was at ease when she was there.

Little piteous hand! — its touch was to her symbolic, imperative.

Eight months had she been at Mellor? And that Marcella, who had been living and moving amid these woods and lanes all this time — that foolish girl, delighting in new grandeurs, and flattered by Aldous Raeburn's attentions — that hot, ambitious person, who had meant to rule a county through a husband — what had become of her? Up to the night of Hurd's death sentence she had still existed in some sort, with her obligations, qualms, remorses. But since then — every day, every hour had been grinding, scorching her away — fashioning in flame and fever this new Marcella who sat here, looking impatiently into another life, which should know nothing of the bonds of the old.

Ah, yes! — her *thought* could distinguish between the act and the man, between the man and his class; but in her *feeling* all was confounded. This awful growth of sympathy in her — strange irony! — had made all sympathy for Aldous Raeburn impossible to her. Marry him? — no! no! — never! But she would make it quite easy to him to give her up. Pride should come in — he should feel no pain in doing it. She had in her pocket the letter she had received from him that afternoon. She had hardly been able to read it. Ear and heart were alike dull to it.

From time to time she probably slept in her chair. Or else it was the perpetual rush of images and sensations through the mind that hastened the hours. Once when the first streaks of the March dawn were

showing through the curtains Minta Hurd sprang up with a loud cry:

"Oh, my God! Jim, *Jim!* Oh, no! — take that off. Oh, *please*, sir, please! Oh, for God's sake, sir!"

Agony struggled with sleep. Marcella, shuddering, held and soothed her, and for a while sleep, or rather the drug in her veins, triumphed again. For another hour or two she lay restlessly tossing from side to side, but unconscious.

Willie hardly moved all night. Again and again Marcella held beef-tea or milk to his mouth, and tried to rouse him to take it, but she could make no impression on the passive lips; the sleeping serenity of the brow never changed.

At last, with a start, Marcella looked round and saw that the morning was fully there. A cold light was streaming through the curtains; the fire was still glowing; but her limbs were stiff and chilled under her shawl. She sprang up, horror descending on her. Her shaking fingers could hardly draw out the watch in her belt.

Ten minutes to eight!

For the first time the girl felt nerve and resolution fail her. She looked at Mrs. Hurd and wrung her hands. The mother was muttering and moving, but not yet fully awake; and Willie lay as before. Hardly knowing what she was doing, she drew the curtains back, as though inspiration might come with the light. The rain-clouds trailed across the common; water dripped heavily from the thatch of the cottage; and a few birds twittered from some bedraggled

larches at the edge of the common. Far away, beyond and beneath those woods to the right, Widrington lay on the plain, with that high-walled stone building at its edge. She saw everything as it must now be happening as plainly as though she were bodily present there — the last meal — the pinioning — the chaplain.

Goaded by the passing seconds, she turned back at last to wake that poor sleeper behind her. But something diverted her. With a start she saw that Willie's eyes were open.

"Willie," she said, running to him, "how are you, dear? Shall I lift your head a little?"

He did not answer, though she thought he tried, and she was struck by the blueness under the eyes and nose. Hurriedly she felt his tiny feet. They were quite cold.

"Mrs. Hurd!" she cried, rousing her in haste; "dear Mrs. Hurd, come and see Willie!"

The mother sprang up bewildered, and, hurrying across the room, threw herself upon him.

"Willie, what is it ails you, dear? Tell mother! Is it your feet are so cold? But we'll rub them — we'll get you warm soon. And here's something to make you better." Marcella handed her some brandy. "Drink it, dear; drink it, sweetheart!" Her voice grew shrill.

"He can't," said Marcella. "Do not let us plague him; it is the end. Dr. Clarke said it would come in the morning."

They hung over him, forgetting everything but him for the moment — the only moment in his little life he came first even with his mother.

There was a slight movement of the hand.

"He wants his animals," said Marcella, the tears pouring down her cheeks. She lifted them and put them on his breast, laying the cold fingers over them.

Then he tried to speak.

"Daddy!" he whispered, looking up fully at his mother; "take 'em to Daddy!"

She fell on her knees beside him with a shriek, hiding her face, and shaking from head to foot. Marcella alone saw the slight, mysterious smile, the gradual sinking of the lids, the shudder of departing life that ran through the limbs.

A heavy sound swung through the air — a heavy repeated sound. Mrs. Hurd held up her head and listened. The church clock tolled eight. She knelt there, struck motionless by terror — by recollection.

"Oh, Jim!" she said, under her breath — "my Jim!"

The plaintive tone — as of a creature that has not even breath and strength left wherewith to chide the fate that crushes it — broke Marcella's heart. Sitting beside the dead son, she wrapt the mother in her arms, and the only words that even her wild spirit could find wherewith to sustain this woman through the moments of her husband's death were words of prayer — the old shuddering cries wherewith the human soul from the beginning has thrown itself on that awful encompassing Life whence it issued, and whither it returns.

CHAPTER XV.

Two days later, in the afternoon, Aldous Raeburn found himself at the door of Mellor. When he entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Boyce, who had heard his ring, was hurrying away.

"Don't go," he said, detaining her with a certain peremptoriness. "I want all the light on this I can get. Tell me, she has *actually* brought herself to regard this man's death as in some sort my doing — as something which ought to separate us?"

Mrs. Boyce saw that he held an opened letter from Marcella crushed in his hand. But she did not need the explanation. She had been expecting him at any hour throughout the day, and in just this condition of mind.

"Marcella must explain for herself," she said, after a moment's thought. "I have no right whatever to speak for her. Besides, frankly, I do not understand her, and when I argue with her she only makes me realise that I have no part or lot in her — that I never had. It is just enough. She was brought up away from me. And I have no natural hold. I cannot help you, or any one else, with her."

Aldous had been very tolerant and compassionate in the past of this strange mother's abdication of her maternal place, and of its probable causes. But it

was not in human nature that he should be either to-day. He resumed his questioning, not without sharpness.

"One word, please. Tell me something of what has happened since Thursday, before I see her. I have written — but till this morning I have had not one line from her."

They were standing by the window, he with his frowning gaze, in which agitation struggled against all his normal habits of manner and expression, fixed upon the lawn and the avenue. She told him briefly what she knew of Marcella's doings since the arrival of Wharton's telegram — of the night in the cottage, and the child's death. It was plain that he listened with a shuddering repulsion.

"Do you know," he exclaimed, turning upon her, "that she may never recover this? Such a strain, such a horror! rushed upon so wantonly, so needlessly."

"I understand. You think that I have been to blame? I do not wonder. But it is not true — not in this particular case. And anyway your view is not mine. Life — and the iron of it — has to be faced, even by women — perhaps, most of all, by women. But let me go now. Otherwise my husband will come in. And I imagine you would rather see Marcella before you see him or any one."

That suggestion told. He instantly gathered himself together, and nervously begged that she would send Marcella to him at once. He could think of nothing, talk of nothing, till he had seen her. She went, and Aldous was left to walk up and down the

room planning what he should say. After the ghastly intermingling of public interests and private misery in which he had lived for these many weeks there was a certain relief in having reached the cleared space — the decisive moment — when he might at last give himself wholly to what truly concerned him. He would not lose her without a struggle. None the less he knew, and had known ever since the scene in the Court library, that the great disaster of his life was upon him.

The handle of the door turned. She was there.

He did not go to meet her. She had come in wrought up to face attack — reproaches, entreaties — ready to be angry or to be humble, as he should give her the lead. But he gave her no lead. She had to break through that quivering silence as best she could.

"I wanted to explain everything to you," she said in a low voice, as she came near to him. "I know my note last night was very hard and abrupt. I didn't mean to be hard. But I am still so tired — and everything that one says, and feels, hurts so."

She sank down upon a chair. This womanish appeal to his pity had not been at all in her programme. Nor did it immediately succeed. As he looked at her, he could only feel the wantonness of this eclipse into which she had plunged her youth and beauty. There was wrath, a passionate protesting wrath, under his pain.

"Marcella," he said, sitting down beside her, "did you read my letter that I wrote you the day before —?"

"Yes."

"And after that, you could still believe that I was indifferent to your grief — your suffering — or to the suffering of any human being for whom you cared? You could still think it, and feel it?"

"It was not what you have said all through," she replied, looking sombrely away from him, her chin on her hand, "it is what you have done."

"What have I done?" he said proudly, bending forward from his seat beside her. "What have I ever done but claim from you that freedom you desire so passionately for others — freedom of conscience — freedom of judgment? You denied me this freedom, though I asked it of you with all my soul. And you denied me more. Through these five weeks you have refused me the commonest right of love — the right to show you myself, to prove to you that through all this misery of differing opinion — misery, much more, oh, much more to me than to you! — I was in truth bent on the same ends with you, bearing the same burden, groping towards the same goal."

"No! no!" she cried, turning upon him, and catching at a word; "what burden have you ever borne? I know you were sorry — that there was a struggle in your mind — that you pitied me — pitied *them*. But you judged it all *from above* — you looked down — and I could not see that you had any right. It made me mad to have such things seen from a height, when I was below — in the midst — *close* to the horror and anguish of them."

"Whose fault was it," he interrupted, "that I was not with you? Did I not offer — entreat? I could

not sign a statement of fact which seemed to me an untrue statement, but what prevented me — prevented us. — However, let me take that point first. Would you," — he spoke deliberately, "would you have had me put my name to a public statement which I, rightly or wrongly, believed to be false, because you asked me? You owe it to me to answer."

She could not escape the penetrating fire of his eye. The man's mildness, his quiet self-renouncing reserve, were all burnt up at last in this white heat of an accusing passion. In return she began to forget her own resolve to bear herself gently.

"You don't remember," she cried, "that what divided us was your — your — incapacity to put the human pity first; to think of the surrounding circumstances — of the debt that you and I and everybody like us owe to a man like Hurd — to one who had been stunted and starved by life as he had been."

Her lip began to tremble.

"Then it comes to this," he said steadily, "that if I had been a poor man, you would have allowed me my conscience — my judgment of right and wrong — in such a matter. You would have let me remember that I was a citizen, and that pity is only one side of justice! You would have let me plead that Hurd's sin was not against me, but against the community, and that in determining whether to do what you wished or no, I must think of the community and its good before even I thought of pleasing you. If I had possessed no more than Hurd, all this would have been permitted me; but because of Maxwell Court — because of my *money*," — she shrank before the

accent of the word — "you refused me the commonest moral rights. *My* scruple, *my* feeling, were nothing to you. Your pride was engaged as well as your pity, and I must give way. Marcella! you talk of justice — you talk of equality — is the only man who can get neither at your hands — the man whom you promised to marry!"

His voice dwelt on that last word, dwelt and broke. He leant over her in his roused strength, and tried to take her hand. But she moved away from him with a cry.

"It is no use! Oh, don't — don't! It may be all true. I was vain, I dare say, and unjust, and hard. But don't you see — don't you understand — if we *could* take such different views of such a case — if it could divide us so deeply — what chance would there be if we were married? I ought never — never — to have said 'Yes' to you — even as I was then. But *now*," she turned to him slowly, "can't you see it for yourself? I am a changed creature. Certain things in me are gone — *gone* — and instead there is a fire — something driving, tormenting — which must burn its way out. When I think of what I liked so much when you asked me to marry you — being rich, and having beautiful things, and dresses, and jewels, and servants, and power — social power — above all *that* — I feel sick and choked. I couldn't breathe now in a house like Maxwell Court. The poor have come to mean to me the only people who really *live*, and really *suffer*. I must live with them, work for them, find out what I can do for them. You must give me up — you must indeed. Oh! and you will! You will

be glad enough, thankful enough, when — when — *you know what I am!*"

He started at the words. Where was the prophetess? He saw that she was lying white and breathless, her face hidden against the arm of the chair.

In an instant he was on his knees beside her.

"Marcella!" he could hardly command his voice, but he held her struggling hand against his lips. "You think that suffering belongs to one class? Have you really no conception of what you will be dealing to me if you tear yourself away from me?"

She withdrew her hand, sobbing.

"Don't, don't stay near me!" she said; "there is — more — there is something else."

Aldous rose.

"You mean," he said in an altered voice, after a pause of silence, "that another influence — another man — has come between us?"

She sat up, and with a strong effort drove back her weeping.

"If I could say to you only this," she began at last, with long pauses, "'I mistook myself and my part in life. I did wrong, but forgive me, and let me go for both our sakes' — that would be — well! — that would be difficult,— but easier than this! Haven't you understood at all? When — when Mr. Wharton came, I began to see things very soon, not in my own way, but in his way. I had never met any one like him — not any one who showed me such possibilities in *myself*— such new ways of using one's life, and not only one's possessions — of looking at all the great questions. I thought it was just friendship, but it

made me critical, impatient of everything else. I was never myself from the beginning. Then,— after the ball," — he stooped over her that he might hear her the more plainly, — "when I came home I was in my room and I heard steps — there are ghost stories, you know, about that part of the house. I went out to see. Perhaps, in my heart of hearts — oh, I can't tell, I can't tell! — anyway, he was there. We went into the library, and we talked. He did not want to touch our marriage,— but he said all sorts of mad things,— and at last — he kissed me."

The last words were only breathed. She had often pictured herself confessing these things to him. But the humiliation in which she actually found herself before him was more than she had ever dreamed of, more than she could bear. All those great words of pity and mercy — all that implication of a moral atmosphere to which he could never attain — to end in this story! The effect of it, on herself, rather than on him, was what she had not foreseen.

Aldous raised himself slowly.

"And when did this happen?" he asked after a moment.

"I told you — the night of the ball — of the murder," she said with a shiver; "we saw Hurd cross the avenue. I meant to have told you everything at once."

"And you gave up that intention?" he asked her, when he had waited a little for more, and nothing came.

She turned upon him with a flash of the old defiance.

"How could I think of my own affairs?"

"Or of mine?" he said bitterly.

She made no answer.

Aldous got up and walked to the chimney-piece. He was very pale, but his eyes were bright and sparkling. When she looked up at him at last she saw that her task was done. His scorn — his resentment — were they not the expiation, the penalty she had looked forward to all along? — and with that determination to bear them calmly? Yet, now that they were there in front of her, they stung.

"So that — for all those weeks — while you were letting me write as I did, while you were letting me conceive you and your action as I did, you had this on your mind? You never gave me a hint; you let me plead; you let me regard you as wrapped up in the unselfish end; you sent me those letters of his — those most misleading letters! — and all the time — "

"But I meant to tell you — I always meant to tell you," she cried passionately. "I would never have gone on with a secret like that — not for your sake — but for my own."

"Yet you did go on so long," he said steadily; "and my agony of mind during those weeks — my feeling towards you — my — "

He broke off, wrestling with himself. As for her, she had fallen back in her chair, physically incapable of anything more.

He walked over to her side and took up his hat.

"You have done me wrong," he said, gazing down upon her. "I pray God you may not do yourself a greater wrong in the future! Give me leave to write

to you once more, or to send my friend Edward Hallin to see you. Then I will not trouble you again."

He waited, but she could give him no answer. Her form as she lay there in this physical and moral abasement printed itself upon his heart. Yet he felt no desire whatever to snatch the last touch — the last kiss — that wounded passion so often craves. Inwardly, and without words, he said farewell to her. She heard his steps across the room; the door shut; she was alone — and free.

BOOK III.

"O Neigung, sage, wie hast du so tief
Im Herzen dich verstecket?
Wer hat dich, die verborgen schlief,
Gewecket?"

CHAPTER I.

"Don't suppose that I feel enthusiastic or sentimental about the 'claims of Labour,'" said Wharton, smiling to the lady beside him. "You may get that from other people, but not from me. I am not moral enough to be a fanatic. My position is simplicity itself. When things are inevitable, I prefer to be on the right side of them, and not on the wrong. There is not much more in it than that. I would rather be on the back of the 'bore' for instance, as it sweeps up the tidal river, than the swimmer caught underneath it."

"Well, that is intelligible," said Lady Selina Farrell, looking at her neighbour, as she crumbled her dinner-roll. To crumble your bread at dinner is a sign of nervousness, according to Sydney Smith, who did it with both hands when he sat next an Archbishop; yet no one for a good many years past had ever suspected Lady Selina of nervousness, though her powers had probably been tried before now by the neighbourhood of many Primates, Catholic and Anglican. For Lady Selina went much into society, and had begun it young.

"Still, you know," she resumed after a moment's pause — "you *play* enthusiasm in public — I suppose you must."

"Oh! of course," said Wharton, indifferently. "That is in the game."

"Why should it be — always? If you are a leader of the people, why don't you educate them? My father says that bringing feeling into politics is like making rhymes in one's account book."

"Well, when you have taught the masses how *not* to feel," said Wharton, laughing, "we will follow your advice. Meanwhile it is our brains and their feelings that do the trick. And by the way, Lady Selina, are *you* always so cool? If you saw the Revolution coming to-morrow into the garden of Alresford House, would you go to the balcony and argue?"

"I devoutly hope there would be somebody ready to do something more to the point," said Lady Selina, hastily. "But of course *we* have enthusiasms too."

"What, the Flag — and the Throne — that kind of thing?"

The ironical attention which Wharton began at this moment to devote to the selection of an olive annoyed his companion.

"Yes," she repeated emphatically, "the Flag and the Throne — all that has made England great in the past. But we know very well that they are not *your* enthusiasms."

Wharton's upper lip twitched a little.

"And you are quite sure that Busbridge Towers has nothing to do with it?" he said suddenly, looking round upon her.

Busbridge Towers was the fine ancestral seat which belonged to Lady Selina's father, that very respectable and ancient peer, Lord Alresford, whom an ungrateful party had unaccountably omitted — for the first time — from the latest Conservative administration.

"Of course we perfectly understand," replied Lady Selina, scornfully, "that your side — and especially your Socialist friends, put down all that *we* do and say to greed and selfishness. It is our misfortune — hardly our fault."

"Not at all," said Wharton, quietly, "I was only trying to convince you that it is a little difficult to drive feeling out of politics. Do you suppose our host succeeds? You perceive? — this is a Radical house — and a Radical banquet?"

He pushed the *menu* towards her significantly. Then his eye travelled with its usual keen rapidity over the room, over the splendid dinner-table, with its display of flowers and plate, and over the assembled guests. He and Lady Selina were dining at the hospitable board of a certain rich manufacturer, who drew enormous revenues from the west, had formed part of the Radical contingent of the last Liberal ministry, and had especially distinguished himself by a series of uncompromising attacks on the ground landlords of London.

Lady Selina sighed.

"It is all a horrible tangle," she said, "and what the next twenty years will bring forth who can tell? Oh! one moment, Mr. Wharton, before I forget. Are you engaged for Saturday week?"

He drew a little note-book out of his pocket and consulted it. It appeared that he was not engaged.

"Then will you dine with us?" She lightly mentioned the names of four or five distinguished guests, including the Conservative Premier of the day. Wharton made her a little ceremonious bow.

"I shall be delighted. Can you trust me to behave?"

Lady Selina's smile made her his match for the moment.

"Oh! we can defend ourselves!" she said. "By the way I think you told me that Mr. Raeburn was not a friend of yours."

"No," said Wharton, facing her look with coolness. "If you have asked Mr. Raeburn for the 23rd, let me crave your leave to cancel that note in my pocket-book. Not for my sake, you understand, at all."

She had difficulty in concealing her curiosity. But his face betrayed nothing. It always seemed to her that his very dark and straight eyebrows, so obtrusive and unusual as compared with the delicacy of the features, of the fair skin and light brown curls, made it easy for him to wear any mask he pleased. By their mere physical emphasis they drew attention away from the subtler and more revealing things of expression.

"They say," she went on, "that he is sure to do well in the House, if only he can be made to take interest enough in the party. But one of his admirers told me that he was not at all anxious to accept this post they have just given him. He only did it to please his grandfather. My father thinks Lord Maxwell much aged this year. He is laid up now, with a chill of some sort I believe. Mr. Raeburn will have to make haste if he is to have any career in the Commons. But you can see he cares very little about it. All his friends tell me they find him changed since that unlucky affair last year. By the way, did you ever see that girl?"

"Certainly. I was staying in her father's house while the engagement was going on."

"Were you!" said Lady Selina, eagerly, "and what did you think of her?"

"Well, in the first place," said Wharton, slowly, "she is beautiful — you knew that?"

Lady Selina nodded.

"Yes. Miss Raeburn, who has told me most of what I know, always throws in a shrug and a 'but' when you ask about her looks. However, I have seen a photograph of her, so I can judge for myself. It seemed to me a beauty that men perhaps would admire more than women."

Wharton devoted himself to his green peas, and made no reply. Lady Selina glanced at him sharply. She herself was by no means a beauty. But neither was she plain. She had a long, rather distinguished face, with a marked nose and a wide thin-lipped mouth. Her plentiful fair hair, a little dull and ashy in colour, was heaped up above her forehead in infinitesimal curls and rolls which did great credit to her maid, and gave additional height to the head and length to a thin white neck. Her light blue eyes were very direct and observant. Their expression implied both considerable knowledge of the world and a natural inquisitiveness. Many persons indeed were of opinion that Lady Selina wished to know too much about you and were on their guard when she approached.

"You admired her very much, I see," she resumed, as Wharton still remained silent.

"Oh, yes. We talked Socialism, and then I defended her poacher for her."

"Oh, I remember. And it is really true, as Miss Raeburn says, that she broke it off because she could not get Lord Maxwell and Mr. Raeburn to sign the petition for the poacher?"

"Somewhere about true," said Wharton, carelessly.

"Miss Raeburn always gives the same account; you can never get anything else out of her. But I sometimes wonder whether it is the *whole* truth. *You* think she was sincere?"

"Well, she gave up Maxwell Court and thirty thousand a year," he replied drily. "I should say she had at least earned the benefit of the doubt."

"I mean," said Lady Selina, "was she in love with anybody else, and was the poacher an excuse?"

She turned upon him as she spoke — a smiling, self-possessed person — a little spoilt by those hard, inquisitive eyes.

"No, I think not," said Wharton, throwing his head back to meet her scrutiny. "If so, nothing has been heard of him yet. Miss Boyce has been at St. Edward's Hospital for the last year."

"To learn nursing? It is what all the women do nowadays, they tell me, who can't get on with their relations or their lovers. Do you suppose it is such a very hard life?"

"I don't want to try!" said Wharton. "Do you?"

She evaded his smile.

"What is she going to do when she has done her training?"

"Settle down and nurse among the poor, I believe."

"Magnificent, no doubt, but hardly business, from her point of view. How much more she might have

done for the poor with thirty thousand a year! And any woman could put up with Aldous Raeburn."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"We come back to those feelings, Lady Selina, you think so badly of."

She laughed.

"Well, but feelings must be intelligible. And this seems so small a cause. However, were you there when it was broken off?"

"No; I have never seen her since the day of the poacher's trial."

"Oh! So she has gone into complete seclusion from all her friends?"

"That I can't answer for. I can only tell you my own experience."

Lady Selina bethought herself of a great many more questions to ask, but somehow did not ask them. The talk fell upon politics, which lasted till the hostess gave the signal, and Lady Selina, gathering up her fan and gloves, swept from the room next after the Countess at the head of the table, while a host of elderly ladies, wives of ministers and the like, stood meekly by to let her pass.

As he sat down again, Wharton made the entry of the dinner at Alresford House, to which he had just promised himself, a little plainer. It was the second time in three weeks that Lady Selina had asked him, and he was well aware that several other men at this dinner-table, of about the same standing and prospects as himself, would be very glad to be in his place. Lady Selina, though she was unmarried, and not particularly handsome or particularly charm-

ing, was a personage — and knew it. As the mistress of her father's various fine houses, and the kinswoman of half the great families of England, she had ample social opportunities, and made, on the whole, clever use of them. She was not exactly popular, but in her day she had been extremely useful to many, and her invitations were prized. Wharton had been introduced to her at the beginning of this, his second session, had adopted with her the easy, aggressive, "personal" manner — which, on the whole, was his natural manner towards women — and had found it immediately successful.

When he had replaced his pocket-book, he found himself approached by a man on his own side of the table, a member of Parliament like himself, with whom he was on moderately friendly terms.

"Your motion comes on next Friday, I think," said the new-comer.

Wharton nodded.

"It'll be a beastly queer division," said the other — "a precious lot of cross-voting."

"That'll be the way with that kind of question for a good while to come — don't you think" — said Wharton, smiling, "till we get a complete reorganisation of parties?"

As he leaned back in his chair, enjoying his cigarette, his half-shut eyes behind the curls of smoke made a good-humoured but contemptuous study of his companion.

Mr. Bateson was a young manufacturer, recently returned to Parliament, and newly married. He had an open, ruddy face, spoilt by an expression of chronic

perplexity, which was almost fretfulness. Not that the countenance was without shrewdness; but it suggested that the man had ambitions far beyond his powers of performance, and already knew himself to be inadequate.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if you get a considerable vote," he resumed, after a pause; "it's like women's suffrage. People will go on voting for this kind of thing, till there seems a chance of getting it. *Then!*"

"Ah, well!" said Wharton, easily, "I see we shan't get *you*."

"I!—vote for an eight-hours day, by local and trade option! In my opinion I might as well vote for striking the flag on the British Empire at once! It would be the death-knell of all our prosperity."

Wharton's artistic ear disliked the mixture of metaphor, and he frowned slightly.

Mr. Bateson hurried on. He was already excited, and had fallen upon Wharton as a prey.

"And you really desire to make it *penal* for us manufacturers — for me in my industry — in spite of all the chances and changes of the market, to work my men more than eight hours a day — *even* if they wish it!"

"We must get our decision, our majority of the adult workers in any given district in favour of an eight-hours day," said Wharton, blandly; "then when they have voted for it, the local authority will put the Act in motion."

"And my men — conceivably — may have voted in the minority, against any such tomfoolery; yet, when the vote is given, it will be a punishable offence for

them, and me, to work overtime? You *actually* mean that; how do you propose to punish us?"

"Well," said Wharton, relighting his cigarette, "that is a much debated point. Personally, I am in favour of imprisonment rather than fine."

The other bounded on his chair.

"You would imprison me for working overtime — with *willing men!*"

Wharton eyed him with smiling composure. Two or three other men — an old general, the smart private secretary of a cabinet minister, and a well-known permanent official at the head of one of the great spending departments — who were sitting grouped at the end of the table a few feet away, stopped their conversation to listen.

"Except in cases of emergency, which are provided for under the Act," said Wharton. "Yes, I should imprison you, with the greatest pleasure in life. Eight hours *plus* overtime is what we are going to stop, *at all hazards!*"

A flash broke from his blue eyes. Then he tranquilly resumed his smoking.

The young manufacturer flushed with angry agitation.

"But you must know, it is inconceivable that you should not know, that the whole thing is stark staring lunacy. In our business, trade is declining, the export falling every year, the imports from France steadily advancing. And you are going to make us fight a country where men work eleven hours a day, for lower wages, with our hands tied behind our backs by legislation of this kind? Well, you know," he threw

himself back in his chair with a contemptuous laugh, "there can be only one explanation. You and your friends, of course, have banished political economy to Saturn — and you suppose that by doing so you get rid of it for all the rest of the world. But I imagine it will beat you, all the same!"

He stopped in a heat. As usual what he found to say was not equal to what he wanted to say, and beneath his anger with Wharton was the familiar fuming at his own lack of impressiveness.

"Well, I dare say," said Wharton, serenely. "However, let's take your 'political economy' a moment, and see if I can understand what you mean by it. There never were two words that meant all things to all men so disreputably!"

And thereupon to the constant accompaniment of his cigarette, and with the utmost composure and good temper, he began to "heckle" his companion, putting questions, suggesting perfidious illustrations, extracting innocent admissions, with a practised shrewdness and malice, which presently left the unfortunate Bateson floundering in a sea of his own contradictions, and totally unable for the moment to attach any rational idea whatever to those great words of his favourite science, wherewith he was generally accustomed to make such triumphant play, both on the platform and in the bosom of the family.

The permanent official round the corner watched the unequal fight with attentive amusement. Once when it was a question of Mill's doctrine of cost of production as compared with that of a leading modern collectivist, he leant forward and supplied a correction

of something Wharton had said. Wharton instantly put down his cigarette and addressed him in another tone. A rapid dialogue passed between them, the dialogue of experts, sharp, allusive, elliptical, in the midst of which the host gave the signal for joining the ladies.

"Well, all I know is," said Bateson, as he got up, "that these kind of questions, if you and your friends have your way, will *wreck* the Liberal party before long — far more effectually than anything Irish has ever done. On these things some of us will fight, if it must come to that."

Wharton laughed.

"It would be a national misfortune if you didn't give us a stiff job," he said, with an airy good-humour which at once made the other's blustering look ridiculous.

"I wonder what that fellow is going to do in the House," said the permanent official to his companion as they went slowly upstairs, Wharton being some distance ahead. "People are all beginning to talk of him as a coming man, though nobody quite knows why, as yet. They tell me he frames well in speaking, and will probably make a mark with his speech next Friday. But his future seems to me very doubtful. He can only become a power as the head of a new Labour party. But where is the party? They all want to be kings. The best point in his favour is that they are likely enough to take a gentleman if they must have a leader. But there still remains the question whether he can make anything out of the material."

"I hope to God he can't!" said the old general, grimly; "it is these town-chatterers of yours that will bring the Empire about our heads before we've done. They've begun it already, wherever they saw a chance."

In the drawing-room Wharton devoted himself for a few minutes to his hostess, a little pushing woman, who confided to his apparently attentive ear a series of grievances as to the bad manners of the great ladies of their common party, and the general evil plight of Liberalism in London from the social point of view.

"Either they give themselves airs—*rediculous* airs!—or they admit everybody!" she said, with a lavish use of white shoulders and scarlet fan by way of emphasis. "My husband feels it just as much as I do. It is a real misfortune for the party that its social affairs should be so villainously managed. Oh! I dare say *you* don't mind, Mr. Wharton, because you are a Socialist. But, I assure you, those of us who still believe in the influence of the best people don't like it."

A point whence Wharton easily led her through a series of spiteful anecdotes bearing on her own social mishaps and rebuffs, which were none the less illuminating because of the teller's anxious effort to give them a dignified and disinterested air. Then, when neither she nor her plight were any longer amusing, he took his leave, exchanging another skirmishing word or two on the staircase with Lady Selina, who it appeared was "going on" as he was, and to the same house.

In a few minutes his hansom landed him at the door of a great mansion in Berkeley Square, where a huge evening party was proceeding, given by one of those Liberal ladies whom his late hostess had been so freely denouncing. The lady and the house belonged to a man who had held high office in the late Administration.

As he made his way slowly to the top of the crowded stairs, the stately woman in white satin and diamonds who was "receiving" on the landing marked him, and when his name was announced she came forward a step or two. Nothing could have been more flattering than the smile with which she gave him her gloved hand to touch.

"Have you been out of town all these Sundays?" she said to him, with the slightest air of soft reproach. "I am always at home, you know — I told you so!"

She spoke with the ease of one who could afford to make whatever social advances she pleased. Wharton excused himself, and they chatted a little in the intervals of her perpetual greetings to the mounting crowd. She and he had met at a famous country house in the Easter recess, and her aristocrat's instinct for all that gives savour and sharpness to the dish of life had marked him at once.

"Sir Hugh wants you to come down and see us in Sussex," she said, stretching her white neck a little to speak after him, as he was at last carried through the drawing-room door by the pressure behind him. "Will you?"

He threw back an answer which she rather took for granted than heard, for she nodded and smiled through

it — stiffening her delicate face the moment afterwards to meet the timid remarks of one of her husband's constituents — asked by Sir Hugh in the streets that afternoon — who happened to present her with the next hand to shake.

Inside, Wharton soon found himself brought up against the ex-Secretary of State himself, who greeted him cordially, and then bantered him a little on his coming motion.

"Oh, I shall be interested to see what you make of it. But, you know, it has no *actuality* — never can have — till you can agree among yourselves. You *say* you want the same thing — I dare say you'll all swear it on Friday — but *really* —"

The statesman shook his head pleasantly.

"The details are a little vague still, I grant you," said Wharton, smiling.

"And you think the principle matters twopence without the details? I have always found that the difficulty with the Christian command, 'Be ye perfect.' The principle doesn't trouble me at all!"

The swaying of the entering throng parted the two speakers, and for a second or two the portly host followed with his eye the fair profile and lightly-built figure of the younger man as they receded from him in the crowd. It was in his mind that the next twenty years, whether this man or that turned out to be important or no, must see an enormous quickening of the political pace. He himself was not conscious of any jealousy of the younger men; but neither did he see among them any commanding personality. This young fellow, with his vivacity, his energy, and

his Socialist whims, was interesting enough; and his problem was interesting — the problem of whether he could make a party out of the heterogeneous group of which he was turning out to be indisputably the ablest member. But what was there *certain* or *inevitable* about his future after all? And it was the same with all the rest. Whereas the leaders of the past had surely announced themselves beyond mistake from the beginning. He was inclined to think, however, that we were levelling up rather than levelling down. The world grew too clever, and leadership was more difficult every day.

Meanwhile Wharton found his progress through these stately rooms extremely pleasant. He was astonished at the multitude of people he knew, at the numbers of faces that smiled upon him. Presently, after half an hour of hard small talk, he found himself for a moment without an acquaintance, leaning against an archway between two rooms, and free to watch the throng. Self-love, "that froward presence, like a chattering child within us," was all alert and happy. A feeling of surprise, too, which had not yet worn away. A year before he had told Marcella Boyce, and with conviction, that he was an outcast from his class. He smiled now at that past *naïveté* which had allowed him to take the flouts of his country neighbours and his mother's unpopularity with her aristocratic relations for an index of the way in which "society" in general would be likely to treat him and his opinions. He now knew, on the contrary, that those opinions had been his best advertisement. Few people, it appeared, were more in

demand among the great than those who gave it out that they would, if they could, abolish the great.

"It's because they're not enough afraid of us — yet," he said to himself, not without spleen. "When we really get to business — if we ever do — I shall not be coming to Lady Cradock's parties."

"Mr. Wharton, do you ever do such a frivolous thing as go to the theatre?" said a pretty, languishing creature at his elbow, the wife of a London theatrical manager. "Suppose you come and see us in 'The Minister's Wooing,' first night next Saturday. I've got *one* seat in my box, for somebody *very* agreeable. Only it must be somebody who can appreciate my frocks!"

"I should be charmed," said Wharton. "Are the frocks so adorable?"

"Adorable! Then I may write you a note? You don't have your horrid Parliament that night, do you?" and she fluttered on.

"I think you don't know my younger daughter, Mr. Wharton?" said a severe voice at his elbow.

He turned and saw an elderly matron with the usual matronly cap and careworn countenance putting forward a young thing in white, to whom he bowed with great ceremony. The lady was the wife of a north-country magnate of very old family, and one of the most exclusive of her kind in London. The daughter, a vision of young shyness and bloom, looked at him with frightened eyes as he leant against the wall beside her and began to talk. She wished he would go away and let her get to the girl friend who was waiting for her and signalling to her across

the room. But in a minute or two she had forgotten to wish anything of the kind. The mixture of audacity with a perfect self-command in the manner of her new acquaintance, that searching half-mocking look, which saw everything in detail, and was always pressing beyond the generalisations of talk and manners, the lightness and brightness of the whole aspect, of the curls, the eyes, the flexible determined mouth, these things arrested her. She began to open her virgin heart, first in protesting against attack, then in confession, till in ten minutes her white breast was heaving under the excitement of her own temerity and Wharton knew practically all about her, her mingled pleasure and remorse in "going out," her astonishment at the difference between the world as it was this year, and the world as it had been last, when she was still in the school-room — her Sunday-school — her brothers — her ideals — for she was a little nun at heart — her favourite clergyman — and all the rest of it.

"I say, Wharton, come and dine, will you, Thursday, at the House — small party — meet in my room?"

So said one of the party whips, from behind into his ear. The speaker was a popular young aristocrat who in the preceding year had treated the member for West Brookshire with chilliness. Wharton turned — to consider a moment — then gave a smiling assent.

"All right!" said the other, withdrawing his hand from Wharton's shoulder — "good-night! — two more of these beastly crushes to fight through till I can get to my bed, worse luck! Are any of your fellows here to-night?"

Wharton shook his head.

"Too austere, I suppose?"

"A question of dress coats, I should think," said Wharton, drily.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"And this calls itself a party gathering — in a radical and democratic house — what a farce it all is!"

"Agreed! good-night."

And Wharton moved on, just catching as he did so the eyes of his new girl acquaintance looking back at him from a distant door. Their shy owner withdrew them instantly, coloured, and passed out of sight.

At the same moment a guest entered by the same door, a tall grave man in the prime of life, but already grey haired. Wharton, to his surprise, recognised Aldous Raeburn, and saw also that the master of the house had him by the arm. They came towards him, talking. The crowd prevented him from getting effectually out of their way, but he turned aside and took up a magazine lying on a bookcase near.

"And you really think him a trifle better?" said the ex-minister.

"Oh, yes, better — certainly better — but I am afraid he will hardly get back to work this session — the doctors talk of sending him away at once."

"Ah, well," said the other, smiling, "we don't intend it seems to let you send anything important up to the Lords yet awhile, so there will be time for him to recruit."

"I wish I was confident about the recruiting," said Raeburn, sadly. "He has lost much strength. I shall go with them to the Italian lakes at the end of next week, see them settled and come back at once."

"Shall you miss a sitting of the commission?" asked his host. Both he and Raeburn were members of an important Labour Commission appointed the year before by the new Conservative government.

"Hardly, I think," said Raeburn, "I am particularly anxious not to miss D——'s evidence."

And they fell talking a little about the Commission and the witnesses recently examined before it. Wharton, who was wedged in by a group of ladies, and could not for the moment move, heard most of what they were saying, much against his will. Moreover Raeburn's tone of quiet and masterly familiarity with what he and his companion were discussing annoyed him. There was nothing in the world that he himself would more eagerly have accepted than a seat on that Commission.

"Ah! there is Lady Cradock!" said Raeburn, perceiving his hostess across a sea of intervening faces, and responding to her little wave of the hand. "I must go and get a few words with her, and then take my aunt away."

As he made his way towards her, he suddenly brushed against Wharton, who could not escape. Raeburn looked up, recognised the man he had touched, flushed slightly and passed on. A bystander would have supposed them strangers to each other.

CHAPTER II.

Two or three minutes later, Wharton was walking down a side street towards Piccadilly. After all the flattering incidents of the evening, the chance meeting with which it concluded had jarred unpleasantly. Confound the fellow! Was he the first man in the world who had been thrown over by a girl because he had been discovered to be a tiresome pedant? For even supposing Miss Boyce had described that little scene in the library at Mellor to her *fiancé* at the moment of giving him his dismissal — and the year before, by the help of all the news that reached him about the broken engagement, by the help still more of the look, or rather the entire absence of look wherewith Raeburn had walked past his greeting and his outstretched hand in a corridor of the House, on the first occasion of their meeting after the news had become public property, Wharton was inclined to think she *had* — what then? No doubt the stern moralist might have something to say on the subject of taking advantage of a guest's position to tamper with another man's betrothed. If so, the stern moralist would only show his usual incapacity to grasp the actual facts of flesh and blood. What chance would he or any one else have had with Marcella Boyce, if she had happened to be in love with the man she had promised to marry? That little trifle had been left

out in the arrangement. It might have worked through perfectly well without; as it happened it had broken down. *Realities* had broken it down. Small blame to them!

"I stood for *truth!*" he said to himself with a kind of rage — "that moment when I held her in the library, she *lived.*— Raeburn offered her a platform, a position; *I* made her think, and feel. I helped her to know herself. Our relation was not passion; it stood on the threshold — but it was real — a true relation so far as it went. That it went no farther was due again to circumstances — realities — of another kind. That *he* should scorn and resent my performance at Mellor is natural enough. If we were in France he would call me out and I should give him satisfaction with all the pleasure in life. But what am *I* about? Are his ways mine? I should have nothing left but to shoot myself to-morrow if they were!"

He walked on swiftly, angrily rating himself for those symptoms of a merely false and conventional conscience which were apt to be roused in him by contact with Aldous Raeburn.

"Has he not interfered with my freedom — stamped his pedantic foot on me — ever since we were boys together! I have owed him one for many years — now I have paid it. Let him take the chances of war!"

Then, driven on by an irritation not to be quieted, he began against his will to think of those various occasions on which he and Aldous Raeburn had crossed each other in the past — of that incident in particular which Miss Raeburn had roughly recalled to Lady Winterbourne's reluctant memory.

Well, and what of it? It had occurred when Wharton was a lad of twenty-one, and during an interval of some months when Aldous Raeburn, who had left Cambridge some three years before, and was already the man of importance, had shown a decided disposition to take up the brilliant, unmanageable boy, whom the Levens, among other relations, had already washed their hands of.

"What did he do it for?" thought Wharton. "Philanthropic motives of course. He is one of the men who must always be saving their souls, and the black sheep of the world come in handy for the purpose. I remember I was flattered then. It takes one some time to understand the workings of the Hebraistic conscience!"

Yes — as it galled him to recollect — he had shown great plasticity for a time. He was then in the middle of his Oxford years, and Raeburn's letters and Raeburn's influence had certainly pulled him through various scrapes that might have been disastrous. Then — a little later — he could see the shooting lodge on the moors above Loch Etive, where he and Raeburn, Lord Maxwell, Miss Raeburn, and a small party had spent the August of his twenty-first birthday. Well — that surly keeper, and his pretty wife who had been Miss Raeburn's maid — could anything be more inevitable? A hard and jealous husband, and one of the softest, most sensuous natures that ever idleness made love to. The thing was in the air! — in the summer, in the blood — as little to be resisted as the impulse to eat when you are hungry, or drink when you thirst. Besides, what particular harm had been

done, what particular harm *could* have been done with such a Cerberus of a husband? As to the outcry which had followed one special incident, nothing could have been more uncalled for, more superfluous. Aldous had demanded contrition, had said strong things with the flashing eyes, the set mouth of a Cato. And the culprit had turned obstinate — would repent nothing — not for the asking. Everything was arguable, and Renan's doubt as to whether he or Théophile Gautier were in the right of it, would remain a doubt to all time — that was all Raeburn could get out of him. After which the Hebraist friend of course had turned his back on the offender, and there was an end of it.

That incident, however, had belonged to a stage in his past life, a stage marked by a certain prolonged tumult of the senses, on which he now looked back with great composure. That tumult had found vent in other adventures more emphatic a good deal than the adventure of the keeper's wife. He believed that one or two of them had been not unknown to Raeburn.

Well, that was done with! His mother's death — that wanton stupidity on the part of fate — and the shock it had somehow caused him, had first drawn him out of the slough of a cheap and facile pleasure on which he now looked back with contempt. Afterwards, his two years of travel, and the joys at once virile and pure they had brought with them, joys of adventure, bodily endurance, discovery, together with the intellectual stimulus which comes of perpetual change, of new heavens, new seas, new societies, had loosened the yoke of the flesh and saved him from

himself. The deliverance so begun had been completed at home, by the various chances and opportunities which had since opened to him a solid and tempting career in that Labour movement his mother had linked him with, without indeed ever understanding either its objects or its men. The attack on capital now developing on all sides, the planning of the vast campaign, and the handling of its industrial troops, these things had made the pursuit of women look insipid, coupled as they were with the thrill of increasing personal success. Passion would require to present itself in new forms, if it was now to take possession of him again.

As to his relation to Raeburn, he well remembered that when, after that long break in his life, he and Aldous had met casually again, in London or elsewhere, Aldous had shown a certain disposition to forget the old quarrel, and to behave with civility, though not with friendliness. As to Wharton he was quite willing, though at the same time he had gone down to contest West Brookshire, and, above all, had found himself in the same house as Aldous Raeburn's betrothed, with an even livelier sense than usual of the excitement to be got out of mere living.

No doubt when Raeburn heard that story of the library — if he had heard it — he recognised in it the man and the character he had known of old, and had shrunk from the connection of both with Marcella Boyce in bitter and insurmountable disgust. A mere Hebraist's mistake!

"That girl's attraction for me was not an attraction of the senses — except so far that for every normal

man and woman charm is charm, and ginger is hot in the mouth and always will be! What I played for with her was *power* — power over a nature that piqued and yet by natural affinity belonged to me. I could not have retained that power, as it happened, by any bait of passion. Even without the Hurd affair, if I had gone on to approach her so, her whole moral nature would have risen against me and her own treachery. I knew that perfectly well, and took the line I did because for the moment the game was too exciting, too interesting, to give up. For the moment! then a few days, — a few weeks later — Good Lord! what stuff we mortals be!"

And he raised his shoulders, mocking, yet by no means disliking his own idiosyncrasies. It had been strange, indeed, that complete change of mental emphasis, that alteration of spiritual axis that had befallen him within the first weeks of his parliamentary life, nay, even before the Hurd agitation was over. That agitation had brought him vigorously and profitably into public notice at a convenient moment. But what had originally sprung from the impulse to retain a hold over a woman, became in the end the instrument of a new and quite other situation. Wharton had no sooner entered the House of Commons than he felt himself strangely at home there. He had the instinct for debate, the instinct for management, together with a sensitive and contriving ambition. He found himself possessed for the moment of powers of nervous endurance that astonished him — a patience of boredom besides, a capacity for drudgery, and for making the best of dull men. The

omens were all favourable, sometimes startlingly so. He was no longer hampered by the ill-will of a county or a family connection. Here in this new world, every man counted strictly for what, in the parliamentary sense, he was worth. Wharton saw that, owing to his public appearances during the two preceding years, he was noticed, listened to, talked about in the House, from the first; and that his position in the newly-formed though still loosely-bound Labour party was one of indefinite promise. The anxieties and pitfalls of the position only made it the more absorbing.

The quick, elastic nature adjusted itself at once. To some kinds of success, nothing is so important as the ability to forget — to sweep the mind free of everything irrelevant and superfluous. Marcella Boyce, and all connected with her, passed clean out of Wharton's consciousness. Except that once or twice he said to himself with a passing smile that it was a good thing he had not got himself into a worse scrape at Mellor. Good heavens! in what plight would a man stand — a man with his career to make — who had given Marcella Boyce claims upon him! As well entangle oneself with the Tragic Muse at once as with that stormy, unmanageable soul!

So much for a year ago. To-night, however, the past had been thrust back upon him, both by Lady Selina's talk and by the meeting with Raeburn. To smart indeed once more under that old ascendency of Raeburn's, was to be provoked into thinking of Raeburn's old love.

Where was Miss Boyce? Surely her year of hospital training must be up by now?

He turned into St. James Street, stopped at a door not far from the Palace end, let himself in, and groped his way to the second floor. A sleepy man-servant turned out of his room, and finding that his master was not inclined to go to bed, brought lights and mineral water. Wharton was practically a teetotaller. He had taken a whim that way as a boy, and a few experiments in drunkenness which he had made at college had only confirmed what had been originally perhaps a piece of notoriety-hunting. He had, as a rule, flawless health; and the unaccustomed headaches and nausea which followed these occasional excesses had disgusted and deterred him. He shook himself easily free of a habit which had never gained a hold upon him, and had ever since found his abstinence a source both of vanity and of distinction. Nothing annoyed him more than to hear it put down to any ethical motive. "If I liked the beastly stuff, I should swim in it to-morrow," he would say with an angry eye when certain acquaintance — not those he made at Labour Congresses — goaded him on the point. "As it is, why should I make it, or chloral, or morphia, or any other poison, my master! What's the inducement — eh, you fellows?"

En revanche he smoked inordinately.

"Is that all, sir," said his servant, pausing behind his chair, after candles, matches, cigarettes, and Apollinaris had been supplied in abundance.

"Yes; go to bed, Williams, but don't lock up. Good-night."

The man departed, and Wharton, going to the window which opened on a balcony looking over St. James

Street, threw it wide, and smoked a cigarette leaning against the wall. It was on the whole a fine night and warm, though the nip of the east wind was not yet out of the air. In the street below there was still a good deal of movement, for it was only just past midnight and the clubs were not yet empty. To his right the turreted gate-house of the Palace with its clock rose dark against a sky covered with light, windy cloud. Beyond it his eye sought instinctively for the Clock Tower, which stood to-night dull and beaconless — like some one in a stupid silence. That light of the sitting House had become to him one of the standing pleasures of life. He had never yet been honestly glad of its extinction.

"I'm a precious raw hand," he confessed to himself with a shake of the head as he stood there smoking. "And it can't last — nothing does."

Presently he laid down his cigarette a moment on the edge of the balcony, and, coming back into the room, opened a drawer, searched a little, and finally took out a letter. He stooped over the lamp to read it. It was the letter which Marcella Boyce had written him some two or three days after the breach of her engagement. That fact was barely mentioned at the beginning of it, without explanation or comment of any kind. Then the letter continued:

"I have never yet thanked you as I ought for all that you have done and attempted through these many weeks. But for them it must have been plain to us both that we could never rightly meet again. I am very destitute just now — and I cling to self-respect as though it were the only thing left me. But that

scene in the past, which put us both wrong with honour and conscience, has surely been wiped out — *thought* — *suffered* away. I feel that I dare now say to you, as I would to any other co-worker and co-thinker — if in the future you ever want my work, if you can set me, with others, to any task that wants doing and that I could do — ask me, and I am not likely to refuse.

"But for the present I am going quite away into another world. I have been more ill than I have ever been in my life this last few days, and they are all, even my father, ready to agree with me that I must go. As soon as I am a little stronger I am to have a year's training at a London hospital, and then I shall probably live for a while in town and nurse. This scheme occurred to me as I came back with the wife from seeing Hurd the day before the execution. I knew then that all was over for me at Mellor.

"As for the wretched break-down of everything — of all my schemes and friendships here — I had better not speak of it. I feel that I have given these village-folk, whom I had promised to help, one more reason to despair of life. It is not pleasant to carry such a thought away with one. But if the tool breaks and blunts, how can the task be done? It can be of no use till it has been re-set.

"I should like to know how your plans prosper. But I shall see your paper and follow what goes on in Parliament. For the present I want neither to write nor get letters. They tell me that as a probationer I shall spend my time at first in washing glasses, and polishing bath-taps, on which my mind rests!

"If you come across my friends of whom I have spoken to you — Louis, Anthony, and Edith Craven — and could make any use of Louis for the *Labour Clarion*, I should be grateful. I hear they have had bad times of late, and Louis has engaged himself, and wants to be married. You remember I told you how we worked at the South Kensington classes together, and how they made me a Venturist?

"Yours very truly,

"MARCELLA BOYCE."

Wharton laid down the letter, making a wry mouth over some of its phrases.

"'*Put us both wrong with honour and conscience.*' '*One more reason for despair of life*' — '*All was over for me at Mellor*' — dear! dear! — how women like the big words — the emphatic pose. All those little odds and ends of charities — that absurd straw-plaiting scheme! Well, perhaps one could hardly expect her to show a sense of humour just then. But why does nature so often leave it out in these splendid creatures?"

"Hullo!" he added, as he bent over the table to look for a pen; "why didn't that idiot give me these?"

For there, under an evening paper which he had not touched, lay a pile of unopened letters. His servant had forgotten to point them out to him. On the top was a letter on which Wharton pounced at once. It was addressed in a bold inky hand, and he took it to be from Nehemiah Wilkins, M.P., his former colleague at the Birmingham Labour Congress, of late a member of the *Labour Clarion* staff, and as such a daily increasing plague and anxiety to the *Clarion's* proprietor.

However, the letter was not from Wilkins. It was from the secretary of a Midland trades-union, with whom Wharton had already been in communication. The union was recent, and represented the as yet feeble organisation of a metal industry in process of transition from the home-workshop to the full factory, or Great Industry stage. The conditions of work were extremely bad, and grievances many; wages were low, and local distress very great. The secretary, a young man of ability and enthusiasm, wrote to Wharton to say that certain alterations in the local "payment lists" lately made by the employers amounted to a reduction of wages; that the workers, beginning to feel the heartening effects of their union, were determined not to submit; that bitter and even desperate agitation was spreading fast, and that a far-reaching strike was imminent Could they count on the support of the *Clarion?* The *Clarion* had already published certain letters on the industry from a Special Commissioner — letters which had drawn public attention, and had been eagerly read in the district itself. Would the *Clarion* now "go in" for them? Would Mr. Wharton personally support them, in or out of Parliament, and get his friends to do the same? To which questions, couched in terms extremely flattering to the power of the *Clarion* and its owner, the secretary appended a long and technical statement of the situation.

Wharton looked up from the letter with a kindling eye. He foresaw an extremely effective case, both for the newspaper and the House of Commons. One of the chief capitalists involved was a man called Denny,

who had been long in the House, for whom the owner of the *Clarion* entertained a strong personal dislike. Denny had thwarted him vexatiously — had perhaps even made him ridiculous — on one or two occasions; and Wharton saw no reason whatever for forgiving one's enemies until, like Narvaez, one had "shot them all." There would be much satisfaction in making Denny understand who were his masters. And with these motives there mingled a perfectly genuine sympathy with the "poor devils" in question, and a desire to see them righted.

"Somebody must be sent down at once," he said to himself. "I suppose," he added, with discontent, "it must be Wilkins."

For the man who had written the articles for the *Labour Clarion*, as Special Commissioner, had some three weeks before left England to take command of a colonial newspaper.

Still pondering, he took up the other letters, turned them over — childishly pleased for the thousandth time by the M.P. on each envelope and the number and variety of his correspondence — and eagerly chose out three — one from his bankers, one from his Lincolnshire agent, and one from the *Clarion* office, undoubtedly this time in Wilkins's hand.

He read them, grew a little pale, swore under his breath, and, angrily flinging the letters away from him, he took up his cigarette again and thought.

The letter from his bankers asked his attention in stiff terms to a largely overdrawn account, and entirely declined to advance a sum of money for which he had applied to them without the guarantee

of two substantial names in addition to his own. The letter from his agent warned him that the extraordinary drought of the past six weeks, together with the general agricultural depression, would certainly mean a large remission of rents at the June quarter day, and also informed him that the holders of his co-operative farm would not be able to pay their half-yearly interest on the capital advanced to them by the landlord.

As to the third letter, it was in truth much more serious than the two others. Wilkins, the passionate and suspicious workman, of great natural ability, who had been in many ways a thorn in Wharton's side since the beginning of his public career, was now member for a mining constituency. His means of support were extremely scanty, and at the opening of the new Parliament Wharton had offered him well-paid work on the *Clarion* newspaper. It had seemed to the proprietor of the *Clarion* a way of attaching a dangerous man to himself, perhaps also of controlling him. Wilkins had grudgingly accepted, understanding perfectly well what was meant.

Since then the relation between the two men had been one of perpetual friction. Wilkins's irritable pride would yield nothing, either in the House or in the *Clarion* office, to Wharton's university education and class advantages, while Wharton watched with alarm the growing influence of this insubordinate and hostile member of his own staff on those labour circles from which the *Clarion* drew its chief support.

In the letter he had just read Wilkins announced to the proprietor of the *Clarion* that in consequence

of the "scandalous mismanagement" of that paper's handling of a certain trade arbitration which had just closed, he, Wilkins, could no longer continue to write for it, and begged to terminate his engagement at once, there being no formal agreement between himself and Wharton as to length of notice on either side. A lively attack on the present management and future prospects of the *Clarion* followed, together with the threat that the writer would do what in him lay henceforward to promote the cause of a certain rival organ lately started, among such working men as he might be able to influence.

"*Brute!* jealous, impracticable brute!" exclaimed Wharton aloud, as he stood chafing and smoking by the window. All the difficulties which this open breach was likely to sow in his path stood out before him in clear relief.

"*Personal* leadership, there is the whole problem," he said to himself in moody despair. "Can I — like Parnell — make a party and keep it together? Can I through the *Clarion* — and through influence *outside* the House — coerce the men *in* the House? If so, we can do something, and Lady Cradock will no longer throw me her smiles. If not the game is up, both for me and for them. They have no cohesion, no common information, no real power. Without leaders they are a mere set of half-educated firebrands whom the trained mind of the country humours because it must, and so far as they have brute force behind them. Without *leadership, I* am a mere unit of the weakest group in the House. Yet, by Jove! it looks as though I had not the gifts."

And he looked back with passionate chagrin on the whole course of his connection with Wilkins, his unavailing concessions and small humiliations, his belief in his own tact and success, all the time that the man dealt with was really slipping out of his hands.

"Damn the fellow!" he said at last, flinging his cigarette away. "Well, that's done with. All the same, he would have liked that Midland job! He has been hankering after a strike there for some time, and might have ranted as he pleased. I shall have the satisfaction of informing him he has lost his opportunity. Now then — who to send? By Jove! what about Miss Boyce's friend?"

He stood a moment twisting the quill-pen he had taken up, then he hastily found a sheet of paper and wrote:

"Dear Miss Boyce, — It is more than a year since I have heard of you, and I have been wondering with much interest lately whether you have really taken up a nursing life. You remember speaking to me of your friends the Cravens? I come across them sometimes at the Venturist meetings, and have always admired their ability. Last year I could do nothing practical to meet your wishes. This year, however, there is an opening on the *Clarion*, and I should like to discuss it with you. Are you in town or to be found? I could come any afternoon next week, *early* — I go down to the House at four — or on Saturdays. But I should like it to be Tuesday or Wednesday, that I might try and persuade you to come to our Eight Hours debate on Friday night. It would interest you, and I think I could get you a seat. We Labour mem-

bers are like the Irishmen — we can always get our friends in.

"I must send this round by Mellor, so it may not reach you till Tuesday. Perhaps you will kindly telegraph. The *Clarion* matter is pressing.

"Yours sincerely,

"H. S. WHARTON."

When he had finished he lingered a moment over the letter, the play of conflicting motives and memories bringing a vague smile to the lips.

Reverie, however, was soon dispersed. He recollected his other correspondents, and springing up he began to pace his room, gloomily thinking over his money difficulties, which were many. He and his mother had always been in want of money ever since he could remember. Lady Mildred would spend huge sums on her various crotchets and campaigns, and then subside for six months into wretched lodgings in a back street of Southsea or Worthing, while the Suffolk house was let, and her son mostly went abroad. This perpetual worry of needy circumstances had always, indeed, sat lightly on Wharton. He was unmarried, and so far scarcity had generally passed into temporary comfort before he had time to find it intolerable. But now the whole situation was becoming more serious. In the first place, his subscriptions and obligations as a member of Parliament, and as one of the few propertied persons in a moneyless movement, were considerable. Whatever Socialism might make of money in the future, he was well aware that money in the present was no less useful to a Socialist poli-

tician than to any one else. In the next place, the starting and pushing of the *Clarion* newspaper — originally purchased by the help of a small legacy from an uncle — had enormously increased the scale of his money transactions and the risks of life.

How was it that, with all his efforts, the *Clarion* was not making, but losing money? During the three years he had possessed it he had raised it from the position of a small and foul-mouthed print, indifferently nourished on a series of small scandals, to that of a Labour organ of some importance. He had written a weekly signed article for it, which had served from the beginning to bring both him and the paper into notice; he had taken pains with the organisation and improvement of the staff; above all, he had spent a great deal more money upon it, in the way of premises and appliances, than he had been, as it turned out, in any way justified in spending.

Hence, indeed, these tears. Rather more than a year before, while the *Clarion* was still enjoying a first spurt of success and notoriety, he had, with a certain recklessness which belonged to his character, invested in new and costly machinery, and had transferred the paper to larger offices. All this had been done on borrowed money.

Then, for some reason or other, the *Clarion* had ceased to answer to the spur — had, indeed, during the past eight months been flagging heavily. The outside world was beginning to regard the *Clarion* as an important paper. Wharton knew all the time that its advertisements were falling off, and its circulation declining. Why? Who can say? If it is true that

books have their fates, it is still more true of newspapers. Was it that a collectivist paper — the rival organ mentioned by Wilkins — recently started by a group of young and outrageously clever Venturists and more closely in touch than the *Clarion* with two or three of the great unions, had filched the *Clarion's* ground? Or was it simply that, as Wharton put it to himself in moments of rage and despondency, the majority of working men "are either sots or blockheads, and will read and support *nothing* but the low racing or police-court news, which is all their intelligences deserve?" Few people had at the bottom of their souls a more scornful distrust of the "masses" than the man whose one ambition at the present moment was to be the accepted leader of English labour.

Finally, his private expenditure had always been luxurious; and he was liable, it will be seen, to a kind of debt that is not easily kept waiting. On the whole, his bankers had behaved to him with great indulgence.

He fretted and fumed, turning over plan after plan as he walked, his curly head sunk in his shoulders, his hands behind his back. Presently he stopped — absently — in front of the inner wall of the room, where, above a heavy rosewood bookcase, brought from his Lincolnshire house, a number of large framed photographs were hung close together.

His eye caught one and brightened. With an impatient gesture, like that of a reckless boy, he flung his thoughts away from him.

"If ever the game becomes too tiresome here, why, the next steamer will take me out of it! What a *gorgeous* time we had on that glacier!"

He stood looking at a splendid photograph of a glacier in the Thibetan Himalayas, where, in the year following his mother's death, he had spent four months with an exploring party. The plate had caught the very grain and glisten of the snow, the very sheen and tint of the ice. He could *feel* the azure of the sky, the breath of the mountain wind. The man seated on the ladder over that bottomless crevasse was himself. And there were the guides, two from Chamounix, one from Grindelwald, and that fine young fellow, the son of the elder Chamounix guide, whom they had lost by a stone-shower on that nameless peak towering to the left of the glacier. Ah, those had been years of *life*, those *Wanderjähre!* He ran over the photographs with a kind of greed, his mind meanwhile losing itself in covetous memories of foamy seas, of long, low, tropical shores with their scattered palms, of superb rivers sweeping with sound and fury round innumerable islands, of great buildings ivory white amid the wealth of creepers which had pulled them into ruin, vacant now for ever of the voice of man, and ringed by untrodden forests.

"'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay,'" he thought. "Ah! but how much did the man who wrote that know about Cathay?"

And with his hands thrust into his pockets, he stood lost awhile in a flying dream that defied civilisation and its cares. How well, how indispensable to remember, that beyond these sweltering streets where we choke and swarm, Cathay stands always waiting! *Somewhere*, while we toil in the gloom and the crowd, there is *air*, there is *sea*, the joy of the sun, the life of

the body, so good, so satisfying! This interminable ethical or economical battle, these struggles selfish or altruistic, in which we shout ourselves hoarse to no purpose — why! they could be shaken off at a moment's notice!

"However" — he turned on his heel — "suppose we try a few other trifles first. What time? those fellows won't have gone to bed yet!"

He took out his watch, then extinguished his candles, and made his way to the street. A hundred yards or so away from his own door he stopped before a well-known fashionable club, extremely small, and extremely select, where his mother's brother, the peer of the family, had introduced him when he was young and tender, and his mother's relations still cherished hopes of snatching him as a brand from the burning.

The front rooms of the club were tolerably full still. He passed on to the back. A door-keeper stationed in the passage stepped back and silently opened a door. It closed instantly behind him, and Wharton found himself in a room with some twenty other young fellows playing baccarat, piles of shining money on the tables, the electric lamps hung over each, lighting every detail of the scene with the same searching disenchanting glare.

"I say!" cried a young dark-haired fellow, like a dishevelled Lord Byron. "Here comes the Labour leader — make room!"

And amid laughter and chaffing he was drawn down to the baccarat table, where a new deal was just beginning. He felt in his pockets for money; his eyes, intent and shining, followed every motion of the

dealer's hand. For three years now, ever since his return from his travels, the gambler's passion had been stealing on him. Already this season he had lost and won — on the whole lost — large sums. And the fact was — so far — absolutely unknown except to the men with whom he played in this room.

CHAPTER III.

"If yer goin' downstairs, Nuss, you'd better take that there scuttle with yer, for the coals is gittin' low an' it ull save yer a journey!"

Marcella looked with amusement at her adviser — a small bandy-legged boy in shirt and knickerbockers, with black Jewish eyes in a strongly featured face. He stood leaning on the broom he had just been wielding, his sleeves rolled up to the shoulder showing his tiny arms; his expression sharp and keen as a hawk's.

"Well, Benny, then you look after your mother while I'm gone, and don't let any one in but the doctor."

And Marcella turned for an instant towards the bed whereon lay a sick woman too feeble apparently to speak or move.

"I aint a goin' ter," said the boy, shortly, beginning to sweep again with energy, "an' if this 'ere baby cries, give it the bottle, I s'pose?"

"No, certainly not," said Marcella, firmly; "it has just had one. You sweep away, Benny, and let the baby alone."

Benny looked a trifle wounded, but recovered himself immediately, and ran a general's eye over Marcella who was just about to leave the room.

"Now look 'ere, Nuss," he said in a tone of pitying remonstrance, "yer never a goin' down to that 'ere coal cellar without a light. Yer'll 'ave to come runnin' up all them stairs again — sure as I'm alive yer will!"

And darting to a cupboard he pulled out a grimy candlestick with an end of dip and some matches, disposed of them at the bottom of the coal-scuttle that Marcella carried over her left arm, and then, still masterfully considering her, let her go.

Marcella groped her way downstairs. The house was one of a type familiar all over the poorer parts of West Central London — the eighteenth-century house inhabited by law or fashion in the days of Dr. Johnson, now parcelled out into insanitary tenements, miserably provided with air, water, and all the necessaries of life, but still showing in its chimney-piece or its decaying staircase signs of the graceful domestic art which had ruled at the building and fitting of it.

Marcella, however, had no eye whatever at the moment for the panelling on the staircase, or the delicate ironwork of the broken balustrade. Rather it seemed to her, as she looked into some of the half-open doors of the swarming rooms she passed, or noticed with disgust the dirt and dilapidation of the stairs, and the evil smells of the basement, that the house added one more to the standing shames of the district — an opinion doubly strong in her when at last she emerged from her gropings among the dens of the lower regions, and began to toil upstairs again with her filled kettle and coal-scuttle.

The load was heavy, even for her young strength, and she had just passed a sleepless night. The even-

ing before she had been sent for in haste to a woman in desperate illness. She came, and found a young Jewess, with a ten days old child beside her, struggling with her husband and two women friends in a state of raging delirium. The room was full to suffocation of loud-tongued, large-eyed Jewesses, all taking turns at holding the patient, and chattering or quarrelling between their turns. It had been Marcella's first and arduous duty to get the place cleared, and she had done it without ever raising her voice or losing her temper for an instant. The noisy pack had been turned out; the most competent woman among them chosen to guard the door and fetch and carry for the nurse; while Marcella set to work to wash her patient and remake the bed as best she could, in the midst of the poor thing's wild shrieks and wrestlings.

It was a task to test both muscular strength and moral force to their utmost. After her year's training Marcella took it simply in the day's work. Some hours of intense effort and strain; then she and the husband looked down upon the patient, a woman of about six-and-twenty, plunged suddenly in narcotic sleep, her matted black hair, which Marcella had not dared to touch, lying in wild waves on the clean bedclothes and night-gear that her nurse had extracted from this neighbour and that — she could hardly have told how.

"*Ach, mein Gott, mein Gott!*" said the husband, rising and shaking himself. He was a Jew from German Poland, and, unlike most of his race, a huge man, with the make and the muscles of a prize-fighter.

Yet, after the struggle of the last two hours he was in a bath of perspiration.

"You will have to send her to the infirmary if this comes on again," said Marcella.

The husband stared in helpless misery, first at his wife, then at the nurse.

"You will not go away, mees," he implored, "you will not leaf me alone?"

Wearied as she was, Marcella could have smiled at the abject giant.

"No, I will stay with her till the morning and till the doctor comes. You had better go to bed."

It was close on three o'clock. The man demurred a little, but he was in truth too worn out to resist. He went into the back room and lay down with the children.

Then Marcella was left through the long summer dawn alone with her patient. Her quick ear caught every sound about her — the heavy breaths of the father and children in the back room, the twittering of the sparrows, the first cries about the streets, the first movements in the crowded house. Her mind all the time was running partly on contrivances for pulling the woman through — for it was what a nurse calls "a good case," one that rouses all her nursing skill and faculty — partly on the extraordinary misconduct of the doctor, to whose criminal neglect and mismanagement of the case she hotly attributed the whole of the woman's illness; and partly — in deep, swift sinkings of meditative thought — on the strangeness of the fact that she should be there at all, sitting in this chair in this miserable room, keeping guard over this Jewish mother and her child!

The year in hospital had *rushed* — dreamless sleep by night, exhausting fatigue of mind and body by day. A hospital nurse, if her work *seizes* her, as it had seized Marcella, never thinks of herself. Now, for some six or seven weeks she had been living in rooms, as a district nurse, under the control of a central office and superintendent. Her work lay in the homes of the poor, and was of the most varied kind. The life was freer, more elastic; allowed room at last to self-consciousness.

But now the night was over. The husband had gone off to work at a factory near, whence he could be summoned at any moment; the children had been disposed of to Mrs. Levi, the helpful neighbour; she herself had been home for an hour to breakfast and dress, had sent to the office asking that her other cases might be attended to, and was at present in sole charge, with Benny to help her, waiting for the doctor.

When she reached the sick-room again with her burdens, she found Benjamin sitting pensive, with the broom across his knees.

"Well, Benny!" she said as she entered, "how have you got on?"

"Yer can't move the dirt on them boards with sweepin'," said Benny, looking at them with disgust; "an' I ain't a goin' to try it no more."

"You're about right there, Benny," said Marcella, mournfully, as she inspected them; "well, we'll get Mrs. Levi to come in and scrub — as soon as your mother can bear it."

She stepped up to the bed and looked at her patient,

who seemed to be passing into a state of restless prostration, more or less under the influence of morphia. Marcella fed her with strong beef tea made by herself during the night, and debated whether she should give brandy. No — either the docter would come directly, or she would send for him. She had not seen him yet, and her lip curled at the thought of him. He had ordered a nurse the night before, but had not stayed to meet her, and Marcella had been obliged to make out his instructions from the husband as best she could.

Benny looked up at her with a wink as she went back to the fire.

"I didn't let none o' *them* in," he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "They come a whisperin' at the door, an' a rattlin' ov the handle as soon as ever you gone downstairs. But I tole 'em just to take theirselves off, an' as 'ow you didn't want 'em. Sillies!"

And taking a crust smeared with treacle out of his pocket, Benny returned with a severe air to the sucking of it.

Marcella laughed.

"Clever Benny," she said, patting his head; "but why aren't you at school, sir?"

Benjamin grinned.

"'Ow d'yer s'pose my ma's goin' to git along without me to do for 'er and the babby?" he replied slily.

"Well, Benny, you'll have the Board officer down on you."

At this the urchin laughed out.

"Why, 'e wor here last week! Ee can't be troublin' 'isself about this 'ere bloomin' street *ev*ery day in the week."

There was a sharp knock at the door.

"The doctor," she said, as her face dismissed the frolic brightness which had stolen upon it for a moment. "Run away, Benny."

Benny opened the door, looked the doctor coolly up and down, and then withdrew to the landing, where his sisters were waiting to play with him.

The doctor, a tall man of thirty, with a red, blurred face and a fair moustache, walked in hurriedly, and stared at the nurse standing by the fire.

"You come from the St. Martin's Association?"

Marcella stiffly replied. He took her temperature-chart from her hand and asked her some questions about the night, staring at her from time to time with eyes that displeased her. Presently she came to an account of the condition in which she had found her patient. The edge on the words, for all their professional quiet, was unmistakable. She saw him flush.

He moved towards the bed, and she went with him. The woman moaned as he approached her. He set about his business with hands that shook. Marcella decided at once that he was not sober, and watched his proceedings with increasing disgust and amazement. Presently she could bear it no longer.

"I think," she said, touching his arm, "that you had better leave it to me — and — go away!"

He drew himself up with a start which sent the things he held flying, and faced her fiercely.

"What do you mean?" he said, "don't you know your place?"

The girl was very white, but her eyes were scornfully steady.

"Yes — I know my place!"

Then with a composure as fearless as it was scathing she said what she had to say. She knew — and he could not deny — that he had endangered his patient's life. She pointed out that he was in a fair way to endanger it again. Every word she said lay absolutely within her sphere as a nurse. His cloudy brain cleared under the stress of it.

Then his eyes flamed, his cheeks became purple, and Marcella thought for an instant he would have struck her. Finally he turned down his shirt-cuffs and walked away.

"You understand," he said thickly, turning upon her, with his hat in his hand, "that I shall not attend this case again till your Association can send me a nurse that will do as she is told without insolence to the doctor. I shall now write a report to your superintendent."

"As you please," said Marcella, quietly. And she went to the door and opened it.

He passed her sneering:

"A precious superior lot you lady-nurses think yourselves, I dare say. I'd sooner have one old gamp than the whole boiling of you!"

Marcella eyed him sternly, her nostrils tightening. "Will you go?" she said.

He gave her a furious glance, and plunged down the stairs outside, breathing threats.

Marcella put her hand to her head a moment, and drew a long breath. There was a certain piteousness in the action, a consciousness of youth and strain.

Then she saw that the landing and the stairs above

were beginning to fill with dark-haired Jewesses, eagerly peering and talking. In another minute or two she would be besieged by them. She called sharply, "Benny!"

Instantly Benny appeared from the landing above, elbowing the Jewesses to right and left.

"What is it you want, Nuss? No, she don't want none o' *you — there!*"

And Benjamin darted into the room, and would have slammed the door in all their faces, but that Marcella said to him —

"Let in Mrs. Levi, please."

The kind neighbour, who had been taking care of the children, was admitted, and then the key was turned. Marcella scribbled a line on a half-sheet of paper, and, with careful directions, despatched Benny with it.

"I have sent for a new doctor," she explained, still frowning and white, to Mrs. Levi. "That one was not fit."

The woman's olive-skinned face lightened all over. "Thanks to the Lord!" she said, throwing up her hands. "But how in the world did you do 't, miss? There isn't a single soul in this house that doesn't go all of a tremble at the sight of 'im. Yet all the women has 'im when they're ill — bound to. They thinks he must be clever, 'cos he's such a brute. I do believe sometimes it's that. He *is* a brute!"

Marcella was bending over her patient, trying so far as she could to set her straight and comfortable again. But the woman had begun to mutter once more words in a strange dialect that Marcella did

not understand, and could no longer be kept still. The temperature was rising again, and another fit of delirium was imminent. Marcella could only hope that she and Mrs. Levi between them would be able to hold her till the doctor came. When she had done all that was in her power, she sat beside the poor tossing creature, controlling and calming her as best she could, while Mrs. Levi poured into her shrinking ear the story of the woman's illness and of Dr. Blank's conduct of it. Marcella's feeling, as she listened, was made up of that old agony of rage and pity! The sufferings of the poor, *because* they were poor — these things often, still, darkened earth and heaven for her. That wretch would have been quite capable, no doubt, of conducting himself decently and even competently, if he had been called to some supposed lady in one of the well-to-do squares which made the centre of this poor and crowded district.

"Hullo, nurse!" said a cheery voice; "you seem to have got a bad case."

The sound was as music in Marcella's ears. The woman she held was fast becoming unmanageable — had just shrieked, first for "poison," then for a "knife," to kill herself with, and could hardly be prevented by the combined strength of her nurse and Mrs. Levi, now from throwing herself madly out of bed, and now from tearing out her black hair in handfuls. The doctor — a young Scotchman with spectacles, and stubbly red beard — came quickly up to the bed, asked Marcella a few short questions, shrugged his shoulders over her dry report of Dr. Blank's proceedings, then took out a black case

from his pocket, and put his morphia syringe together.

For a long time no result whatever could be obtained by any treatment. The husband was sent for, and came trembling, imploring doctor and nurse, in the intervals of his wife's paroxysms, not to leave him alone.

Marcella, absorbed in the tragic horror of the case, took no note of the passage of time. Everything that the doctor suggested she carried out with a deftness, a tenderness, a power of mind, which keenly affected his professional sense. Once, the poor mother, left unguarded for an instant, struck out with a wild right hand. The blow caught Marcella on the cheek, and she drew back with a slight involuntary cry.

"You are hurt," said Dr. Angus, running up to her.

"No, no," she said, smiling through the tears that the shock had called into her eyes, and putting him rather impatiently aside; "it is nothing. You said you wanted some fresh ice."

And she went into the back room to get it.

The doctor stood with his hands in his pockets, studying the patient.

"You will have to send her to the infirmary," he said to the husband; "there is nothing else for it."

Marcella came back with the ice, and was able to apply it to the head. The patient was quieter — was, in fact, now groaning herself into a fresh period of exhaustion.

The doctor's sharp eyes took note of the two figures, the huddled creature on the pillows and the stately head bending over her, with the delicately hollowed

cheek, whereon the marks of those mad fingers stood out red and angry. He had already had experience of this girl in one or two other cases.

"Well," he said, taking up his hat, "it is no good shilly-shallying. I will go and find Dr. Swift." Dr. Swift was the parish doctor.

When he had gone, the big husband broke down and cried, with his head against the iron of the bed close to his wife. He put his great hand on hers, and talked to her brokenly in their own patois. They had been eight years married, and she had never had a day's serious illness till now. Marcella's eyes filled with tears as she moved about the room, doing various little tasks.

At last she went up to him.

"Won't you go and have some dinner?" she said to him kindly. "There's Benjamin calling you," and she pointed to the door of the back room, where stood Benny, his face puckered with weeping, forlornly holding out a plate of fried fish, in the hope of attracting his father's attention.

The man, who in spite of his size and strength was in truth childishly soft and ductile, went as he was bid, and Marcella and Mrs. Levi set about doing what they could to prepare the wife for her removal.

Presently parish doctor and sanitary inspector appeared, strange and peremptory invaders who did but add to the terror and misery of the husband. Then at last came the ambulance, and Dr. Angus with it. The patient, now once more plunged in narcotic stupor, was carried downstairs by two male nurses, Dr. Angus presiding. Marcella stood in the

doorway and watched the scene, — the gradual disappearance of the helpless form on the stretcher, with its fevered face under the dark mat of hair; the figures of the straining men heavily descending step by step, their heads and shoulders thrown out against the dirty drabs and browns of the staircase; the crowd of Jewesses on the stairs and landing, craning their necks, gesticulating and talking, so that Dr. Angus could hardly make his directions heard, angrily as he bade them stand back; and on the top stair, the big husband, following the form of his departing and unconscious wife with his eyes, his face convulsed with weeping, the whimpering children clinging about his knees.

How hot it was! — how stifling the staircase smelt, and how the sun beat down from that upper window on the towzled unkempt women with their large-eyed children.

CHAPTER IV.

MARCELLA on her way home turned into a little street leading to a great block of model dwellings, which rose on the right hand side and made everything else, the mews entrance opposite, the lines of squalid shops on either side, look particularly small and dirty. The sun was beating fiercely down, and she was sick and tired.

As she entered the iron gate of the dwellings, and saw before her the large asphalted court round which they ran — blazing heat on one side of it, and on the other some children playing cricket against the wall with chalk marks for wickets — she was seized with depression. The tall yet mean buildings, the smell of dust and heat, the general impression of packed and crowded humanity — these things, instead of offering her rest, only continued and accented the sense of strain, called for more endurance, more making the best of it.

But she found a tired smile for some of the children who ran up to her, and then she climbed the stairs of the E. block, and opened the door of her own tenement, number 10. In number 9 lived Minta Hurd and her children, who had joined Marcella in London some two months before. In sets 7 and 8, on either side of Marcella and the Hurds, lived two widows,

each with a family, who were mostly out charing during the day.

Marcella's Association allowed its District Nurses to live outside the "home" of the district on certain conditions, which had been fulfilled in Marcella's case by her settlement next door to her old friends in these buildings which were inhabited by a very respectable though poor class. Meanwhile the trustees of the buildings had allowed her to make a temporary communication between her room and the Hurds, so that she could either live her own solitary and independent life, or call for their companionship, as she pleased.

As she shut her door behind her she found herself in a little passage or entry. To the left was her bedroom. Straight in front of her was the living room with a small close range in it, and behind it a little back kitchen.

The living room was cheerful and even pretty. Her art-student's training showed itself. The cheap blue and white paper, the couple of oak flap tables from a broker's shop in Marchmont Street, the two or three cane chairs with their bright chintz cushions, the Indian rug or two on the varnished boards, the photographs and etchings on the walls, the books on the tables — there was not one of these things that was not in its degree a pleasure to her young senses, that did not help her to live her life. This afternoon as she opened the door and looked in, the pretty colours and forms in the tiny room were as water to the thirsty. Her mother had sent her some flowers the day before. There they were on the tables, great bunches of honey-

suckles, of blue-bells, and Banksia roses. And over the mantelpiece was a photograph of the place where such flowers as Mellor possessed mostly grew — the unkempt lawn, the old fountain and grey walls of the Cedar Garden.

The green blind over the one window which looked into the court, had been drawn down against the glare of the sun, as though by a careful hand. Beside a light wooden rocking chair, which was Marcella's favourite seat, a tray of tea things had been put out. Marcella drew a long breath of comfort as she put down her bag.

"Now, *can* I wait for my tea till I have washed and dressed?"

She argued with herself an instant as though she had been a greedy child, then, going swiftly into the back kitchen, she opened the door between her rooms and the Hurds.

"Minta!"

A voice responded.

"Minta, make me some tea and boil an egg! there's a good soul! I will be back directly."

And in ten minutes or so she came back again into the sitting-room, daintily fresh and clean but very pale. She had taken off her nurse's dress and apron, and had put on something loose and white that hung about her in cool folds.

But Minta Hurd, who had just brought in the tea, looked at her disapprovingly.

"Whatever are you so late for?" she asked a little peevishly. "You'll get ill if you go missing your dinner."

"I couldn't help it, Minta, it was such a bad case."

Mrs. Hurd poured out the tea in silence, unappeased. Her mind was constantly full of protest against this nursing. Why should Miss Boyce do such "funny things" — why should she live as she did, at all?

Their relation to each other was a curious one. Marcella, knowing that the life of Hurd's widow at Mellor was gall and bitterness, had sent for her at the moment that she herself was leaving the hospital, offering her a weekly sum in return for a little cooking and house service. Minta already possessed a weekly pension, coming from a giver unknown to her. It was regularly handed to her by Mr. Harden, and she could only imagine that one of the "gentlemen" who had belonged to the Hurd Reprieve Committee, and had worked so hard for Jim, was responsible for it, out of pity for her and her children. The payment offered her by Miss Boyce would defray the expense of London house-rent, the children's schooling, and leave a trifle over. Moreover she was pining to get away from Mellor. Her first instinct after her husband's execution had been to hide herself from all the world. But for a long time her precarious state of health, and her dependence first on Marcella, then on Mary Harden, made it impossible for her to leave the village. It was not till Marcella's proposal came that her way was clear. She sold her bits of things at once, took her children and went up to Brown's buildings.

Marcella met her with the tenderness, the tragic tremor of feeling from which the peasant's wife shrank anew, bewildered, as she had often shrunk from it in

the past. Jim's fate had made her an old woman at thirty-two. She was now a little shrivelled consumptive creature with almost white hair, and a face from which youth had gone, unless perhaps there were some traces of it in the still charming eyes, and small open mouth. But these changes had come upon her she knew not why, as the result of blows she felt but had never reasoned about. Marcella's fixed mode of conceiving her and her story caused her from the beginning of their fresh acquaintance a dumb irritation and trouble she could never have explained. It was so tragic, reflective, exacting. It seemed to ask of her feelings that she could not have, to expect from her expression that was impossible. And it stood also between her and the friends and distractions that she would like to have. Why shouldn't that queer man, Mr. Strozzi, who lived down below, and whose name she could not pronounce, come and sit sometimes of an evening, and amuse her and the children? He was a "Professor of Elocution," and said and sung comic pieces. He was very civil and obliging too; she liked him. Yet Miss Boyce was evidently astonished that she could make friends with him, and Minta perfectly understood the lift of her dark eyebrows whenever she came in and found him sitting there.

Meanwhile Marcella had expected her with emotion, and had meant through this experiment to bring herself truly near to the poor. Minta must not call her Miss Boyce, but by her name; which, however, Minta, reddening, had declared she could never do. Her relation to Marcella was not to be that of servant in

any sense, but of friend and sister; and on her and her children Marcella had spent from the beginning a number of new womanish wiles which, strangely enough, this hard, strenuous life had been developing in her. She would come and help put the children to bed; she would romp with them in their night-gowns; she would bend her imperious head over the anxious endeavour to hem a pink cotton pinafore for Daisy, or dress a doll for the baby. But the relation jarred and limped perpetually, and Marcella wistfully thought it her fault.

Just now, however, as she sat gently swaying backwards and forwards in the rocking-chair, enjoying her tea, her mood was one of nothing but content.

"Oh, Minta, give me another cup. I want to have a sleep so badly, and then I am going to see Miss Hallin, and stay to supper with them."

"Well, you mustn't go out in them nursin' things again," said Minta, quickly; "I've put you in some lace in your black dress, an' it looks beautiful."

"Oh, thank you, Minta; but that black dress always seems to me too smart to walk about these streets in."

"It's just *nice*," said Minta, with decision. "It's just what everybody that knows you — what your mamma — would like to see you in. I can't abide them nursin' clothes — nasty things!"

"I declare!" cried Marcella, laughing, but outraged; "I never like myself so well in anything."

Minta was silent, but her small mouth took an obstinate look. What she really felt was that it was absurd for ladies to wear caps and aprons and plain

black bonnets, when there was no need for them to do anything of the kind.

"Whatever have you been doing to your cheek?" she exclaimed, suddenly, as Marcella handed her the empty cup to take away.

Marcella explained shortly, and Minta looked more discontented than ever. "A lot of low people as ought to look after themselves," that was how in her inmost mind she generally defined Marcella's patients. She had been often kind and soft to her neighbours at Mellor, but these dirty, crowded Londoners were another matter.

"Where is Daisy?" asked Marcella as Minta was going away with the tea; "she must have come back from school."

"Here I am," said Daisy, with a grin, peeping in through the door of the back kitchen. "Mother, baby's woke up."

"Come here, you monkey," said Marcella; "come and go to sleep with me. Have you had your tea?"

"Yes, lots," said Daisy, climbing up into Marcella's lap. "Are you going to be asleep a long time?"

"No — only a nap. Oh! Daisy, I'm so tired. Come and cuddlie a bit! If you don't go to sleep you know you can slip away — I shan't wake."

The child, a slight, red-haired thing, with something of the ethereal charm that her dead brother had possessed, settled herself on Marcella's knees, slipped her left thumb into her mouth, and flung her other arm round Marcella's neck. They had often gone to sleep so. Mrs. Hurd came back, drew down the blind further, threw a light shawl over them both, and left them.

An hour and a half later Minta came in again as she had been told. Daisy had slipped away, but Marcella was still lying in the perfect gentleness and relaxation of sleep.

"You said I was to come and wake you," said Minta, drawing up the blind; "but I don't believe you're a bit fit to be going about. Here's some hot water, and there's a letter just come."

Marcella woke with a start, Minta put the letter on her knee, and dream and reality flowed together as she saw her own name in Wharton's handwriting.

She read the letter, then sat flushed and thinking for a while with her hands on her knees.

A little while later she opened the Hurds' front-door.

"Minta, I am going now. I shall be back early after supper, for I haven't written my report."

"There — now you look something like!" said Minta, scanning her approvingly — the wide hat and pretty black dress. "Shall Daisy run out with that telegram?"

"No, thanks. I shall pass the post. Good-bye."

And she stooped and kissed the little withered woman. She wished, ardently wished, that Minta would be more truly friends with her!

After a brisk walk through the June evening she stopped — still within the same district — at the door of a house in a long, old-fashioned street, wherein the builder was busy on either hand, since most of the long leases had just fallen in. But the house she entered was still untouched. She climbed a last-century staircase, adorned with panels of stucco work —

slender Italianate reliefs of wreaths, ribbons, and medallions on a pale green ground. The decoration was clean and cared for, the house in good order. Eighty years ago it was the home of a famous judge, who entertained in its rooms the legal and literary celebrities of his day. Now it was let out to professional people in lodgings or unfurnished rooms. Edward Hallin and his sister occupied the top floor.

Miss Hallin, a pleasant-looking, plain woman of about thirty-five, came at once in answer to Marcella's knock, and greeted her affectionately. Edward Hallin sprang up from a table at the further end of the room.

"You are so late! Alice and I had made up our minds you had forgotten us!"

"I didn't get home till four, and then I had to have a sleep," she explained, half shyly.

"What! you haven't been night-nursing?"

"Yes, for once."

"Alice, tell them to bring up supper, and let's look after her."

He wheeled round a comfortable chair to the open window — the charming circular bow of last-century design, which filled up the end of the room and gave it character. The window looked out on a quiet line of back gardens, such as may still be seen in Bloomsbury, with fine plane trees here and there just coming into full leaf; and beyond them the backs of another line of houses in a distant square, with pleasant irregularities of old brickwork and tiled roof. The mottled trunks of the planes, their blackened twigs and branches, their thin, beautiful leaves, the forms of the houses beyond, rose in a charming medley of

line against the blue and peaceful sky. No near sound was to be heard, only the distant murmur that no Londoner escapes; and some of the British Museum pigeons were sunning themselves on the garden-wall below.

Within, the Hallins' room was spacious and barely furnished. The walls, indeed, were crowded with books, and broken, where the books ceased, by photographs of Italy and Greece; but of furniture proper there seemed to be little beside Hallin's large writing-table facing the window, and a few chairs, placed on the blue drugget which brother and sister had chosen with a certain anxiety, dreading secretly lest it should be a piece of self-indulgence to buy what pleased them both so much. On one side of the fireplace was Miss Hallin's particular corner; her chair, the table that held her few special books, her work-basket, with its knitting, her accounts. There, in the intervals of many activities, she sat and worked or read, always cheerful and busy, and always watching over her brother.

"I wish," said Hallin, with some discontent, when Marcella had settled herself, "that we were going to be alone to-night; that would have rested you more."

"Why, who is coming?" said Marcella, a little flatly. She had certainly hoped to find them alone.

"Your old friend, Frank Leven, is coming to supper. When he heard you were to be here he vowed that nothing could or should keep him away. Then, after supper, one or two people asked if they might come in. There are some anxious things going on."

He leant his head on his hand for a moment with a sigh, then forcibly wrenched himself from what were evidently recurrent thoughts.

"Do tell me some more of what you are doing!" he said, bending forward to her. "You don't know how much I have thought of what you have told me already."

"I'm doing just the same," she said, laughing. "Don't take so much interest in it. It's the fashion just now to admire nurses; but it's ridiculous. We do our work like other people — sometimes badly, sometimes well. And some of us wouldn't do it if we could help it."

She threw out the last words with a certain vehemence, as though eager to get away from any sentimentalism about herself. Hallin studied her kindly.

"Is this miscellaneous work a relief to you after hospital?" he asked.

"For the present. It is more exciting, and one sees more character. But there are drawbacks. In hospital everything was settled for you — every hour was full, and there were always orders to follow. And the 'off' times were no trouble — I never did anything else but walk up and down the Embankment if it was fine, or go to the National Gallery if it was wet."

"And it was the monotony you liked?"

She made a sign of assent.

"Strange!" said Hallin, "who could ever have foreseen it?"

She flushed.

"You might have foreseen it, I think," she said,

not without a little impatience. "But I didn't like it all at once. I hated a great deal of it. If they had let me alone all the time to scrub and polish and wash — the things they set me to at first — I thought I should have been quite happy. To see my table full of glasses without a spot, and my brass-taps shining, made me as proud as a peacock! But then of course I had to learn the real work, and that was very odd at first."

"How? Morally?"

She nodded, laughing at her own remembrances. "Yes — it seemed to me all topsy-turvy. I thought the Sister at the head of the ward rather a stupid person. If I had seen her at Mellor I shouldn't have spoken two words to her. And here she was ordering me about — rating me as I had never rated a housemaid — laughing at me for not knowing this or that, and generally making me feel that a raw probationer was one of the things of least account in the whole universe. I knew perfectly well that she had said to herself, 'Now then I must take that proud girl down a peg, or she will be no use to anybody;' and I had somehow to put up with it."

"Drastic!" said Hallin, laughing; "did you comfort yourself by reflecting that it was everybody's fate?"

Her lip twitched with amusement.

"Not for a long time. I used to have the most absurd ideas! — sometimes looking back I can hardly believe it — perhaps it was partly a queer state of nerves. When I was at school and got in a passion I used to try and overawe the girls by shaking my

Speaker great-uncle in their faces. And so in hospital; it would flash across me sometimes in a plaintive sort of way that they *couldn't* know that I was Miss Boyce of Mellor, and had been mothering and ruling the whole of my father's village — or they wouldn't treat me so. Mercifully I held my tongue. But one day it came to a crisis. I had had to get things ready for an operation, and had done very well. Dr. Marshall had paid me even a little compliment all to myself. But then afterwards the patient was some time in coming to, and there had to be hot-water bottles. I had them ready of course; but they were too hot, and in my zeal and nervousness I burnt the patient's elbow in two places. Oh! the *fuss*, and the scolding, and the humiliation! When I left the ward that evening I thought I would go home next day."

"But you didn't?"

"If I could have sat down and thought it out, I should probably have gone. But I couldn't think it out — I was too *dead* tired. That is the chief feature of your first months in hospital — the utter helpless fatigue at night. You go to bed aching and you wake up aching. If you are healthy as I was, it doesn't hurt you; but, when your time comes to sleep, sleep you *must*. Even that miserable night my head was no sooner on the pillow than I was asleep; and next morning there was all the routine as usual, and the dread of being a minute late on duty. Then when I got into the ward the Sister looked at me rather queerly and went out of her way to be kind to me. Oh! I was so grateful to her! I could have brushed her boots or done any other menial service for her

with delight. And — then — somehow I pulled through. The enormous interest of the work seized me — I grew ambitious — they pushed me on rapidly — everybody seemed suddenly to become my friend instead of my enemy — and I ended by thinking the hospital the most fascinating and engrossing place in the whole world."

"A curious experience," said Hallin. "I suppose you had never obeyed any one in your life before?"

"Not since I was at school — and then — not much!"

Hallin glanced at her as she lay back in her chair. How richly human the face had grown! It was as forcible as ever in expression and colour, but that look which had often repelled him in his first acquaintance with her, as of a hard speculative eagerness more like the ardent boy than the woman, had very much disappeared. It seemed to him absorbed in something new — something sad and yet benignant, informed with all the pathos and the pain of growth.

"How long have you been at work to-day?" he asked her.

"I went at eleven last night. I came away at four this afternoon."

Hallin exclaimed, "You had food?"

"Do you think I should let myself starve with my work to do?" she asked him, with a shade of scorn and her most professional air. "And don't suppose that such a case occurs often. It is a very rare thing for us to undertake night-nursing at all."

"Can you tell me what the case was?"

She told him vaguely, describing also in a few words her encounter with Dr. Blank.

"I suppose he will make a fuss," she said, with a restless look, "and that I shall be blamed."

"I should think your second doctor will take care of that!" said Hallin.

"I don't know. I couldn't help it. But it is one of our first principles not to question a doctor. And last week too I got the Association into trouble. A patient I had been nursing for weeks and got quite fond of had to be removed to hospital. She asked me to cut her hair. It was matted dreadfully, and would have been cut off directly she got to the ward. So I cut it, left her all comfortable, and was to come back at one to meet the doctor and help get her off. When I came, I found the whole court in an uproar. The sister of the woman, who had been watching for me, stood on the doorstep, and implored me to go away. The husband had gone out of his senses with rage because I had cut his wife's hair without his consent. 'He'll murder you, Nuss!' said the sister, 'if he sees you! Don't come in!—he's mad—he's *been going round on 'is 'ands and knees on the floor!*'"—

Hallin interrupted with a shout of laughter. Marcella laughed too; but to his amazement he saw that her hand shook, and that there were tears in her eyes.

"It's all very well," she said with a sigh, "but I had to come away in disgrace, all the street looking on. And he made such a fuss at the office as never was. It was unfortunate—we don't want the people set against the nurses. And now Dr. Blank!—I seem to be always getting into scrapes. It is different from hospital, where everything is settled for one."

Hallin could hardly believe his ears. Such woman-

ish terrors and depressions from Marcella Boyce! Was she, after all, too young for the work, or was there some fret of the soul reducing her natural force? He felt an unwonted impulse of tenderness towards her — such as one might feel towards a tired child — and set himself to cheer and rest her.

He had succeeded to some extent, when he saw her give a little start, and following her eyes he perceived that unconsciously his arm, which was resting on the table, had pushed into her view a photograph in a little frame, which had been hitherto concealed from her by a glass of flowers. He would have quietly put it out of sight again, but she sat up in her chair.

"Will you give it me?" she said, putting out her hand.

He gave it her at once.

"Alice brought it home from Miss Raeburn the other day. His aunt made him sit to one of the photographers who are always besieging public men. We thought it good."

"It is very good," she said, after a pause. "Is the hair really — as grey as that?" She pointed to it.

"Quite. I am very glad that he is going off with Lord Maxwell to Italy. It will be ten days' break for him at any rate. His work this last year has been very heavy. He has had his grandfather's to do really, as well as his own; and this Commission has been a stiff job too. I am rather sorry that he has taken this new post."

"What post?"

"Didn't you hear? They have made him Under-Secretary to the Home Department. So that he is now in the Government."

She put back the photograph, and moved her chair a little so as to see more of the plane trees and the strips of sunset cloud.

"How is Lord Maxwell?" she asked presently.

"Much changed. It might end in a sudden break-up at any time."

Hallin saw a slight contraction pass over her face. He knew that she had always felt an affection for Lord Maxwell. Suddenly Marcella looked hastily round her. Miss Hallin was busy with a little servant at the other end of the room making arrangements for supper.

"Tell me," she said, bending over the arm of her chair and speaking in a low, eager voice, "he is beginning to forget it?"

Hallin looked at her in silence, but his half sad, half ironic smile suggested an answer from which she turned away.

"If he only would!" she said, speaking almost to herself, with a kind of impatience. "He ought to marry, for everybody's sake."

"I see no sign of his marrying — at present," said Hallin, drily.

He began to put some papers under his hand in order. There was a cold dignity in his manner which she perfectly understood. Ever since that day — that never-forgotten day — when he had come to her the morning after her last interview with Aldous Raeburn — come with reluctance and dislike, because Aldous had asked it of him — and had gone away her friend, more drawn to her, more touched by her than he had ever been in the days of the engagement, their

relation on this subject had been the same. His sweetness and kindness to her, his influence over her life during the past eighteen months, had been very great. In that first interview, the object of which had been to convey to her a warning on the subject of the man it was thought she might allow herself to marry, something in the manner with which he had attempted his incredibly difficult task — its simplicity, its delicate respect for her personality, its suggestion of a character richer and saintlier than anything she had yet known, and unconsciously revealing itself under the stress of emotion — this something had suddenly broken down his pale, proud companion, had to his own great dismay brought her to tears, and to such confidences, such indirect askings for help and understanding as amazed them both.

Experiences of this kind were not new to him. His life consecrated to ideas, devoted to the wresting of the maximum of human service from a crippling physical weakness; the precarious health itself which cut him off from a hundred ordinary amusements and occupations, and especially cut him off from marriage — together with the ardent temperament, the charm, the imaginative insight which had been his cradle-gifts — these things ever since he was a lad had made him again and again the guide and prop of natures stronger and stormier than his own. Often the unwilling guide; for he had the half-impatient breathless instincts of the man who has set himself a task, and painfully doubts whether he will have power and time to finish it. The claims made upon him seemed to him often to cost him physical and brain energy he could ill spare.

But his quick tremulous sympathy rendered him really a defenceless prey in such matters. Marcella threw herself upon him as others had done; and there was no help for it. Since their first memorable interview, at long intervals, he had written to her and she to him. Of her hospital life, till to-night, she had never told him much. Her letters had been the passionate outpourings of a nature sick of itself, and for the moment of living; full of explanations which really explained little; full too of the untaught pangs and questionings of a mind which had never given any sustained or exhaustive effort to any philosophical or social question, and yet was in a sense tortured by them all — athirst for an impossible justice, and aflame for ideals mocked first and above all by the writer's own weakness and defect. Hallin had felt them interesting, sad, and, in a sense, fine; but he had never braced himself to answer them without groans. There were so many other people in the world in the same plight!

Nevertheless, all through the growth of friendship one thing had never altered between them from the beginning — Hallin's irrevocable judgment of the treatment she had bestowed on Aldous Raeburn. Never throughout the whole course of their acquaintance had he expressed that judgment to her in so many words. Notwithstanding, she knew perfectly well both the nature and the force of it. It lay like a rock in the stream of their friendship. The currents of talk might circle round it, imply it, glance off from it; they left it unchanged. At the root of his mind towards her, at the bottom of his gentle sensitive

nature, there was a sternness which he often forgot — she never.

This hard fact in their relation had insensibly influenced her greatly, was constantly indeed working in and upon her, especially since the chances of her nursing career had brought her to settle in this district, within a stone's throw of him and his sister, so that she saw them often and intimately. But it worked in different ways. Sometimes — as to-night — it evoked a kind of defiance.

A minute or two after he had made his remark about Aldous, she said to him suddenly,

"I had a letter from Mr. Wharton to-day. He is coming to tea with me to-morrow, and I shall probably go to the House on Friday with Edith Craven to hear him speak."

Hallin gave a slight start at the name. Then he said nothing; but went on sorting some letters of the day into different heaps. His silence roused her irritation.

"Do you remember," she said, in a low, energetic voice, "that I told you I could never be ungrateful, never forget what he had done?"

"Yes, I remember," he said, not without a certain sharpness of tone. "You spoke of giving him help if he ever asked it of you — has he asked it?"

She explained that what he seemed to be asking was Louis Craven's help, and that his overtures with regard to the *Labour Clarion* were particularly opportune, seeing that Louis was pining to be able to marry, and was losing heart, hope, and health for want of some fixed employment. She spoke warmly of her friends

and their troubles, and Hallin's inward distaste had to admit that all she said was plausible. Since the moment in that strange talk which had drawn them together, when she had turned upon him with the passionate cry — "I see what you mean, perfectly! but I am not going to marry Mr. Wharton, so don't trouble to warn me — for the matter of that he has warned me himself: — but my *gratitude* he *has* earned, and if he asks for it I will *never* deny it him" — since that moment there had been no word of Wharton between them. At the bottom of his heart Hallin distrusted her, and was ashamed of himself because of it. His soreness and jealousy for his friend knew no bounds. "If that were to come on again" — he was saying to himself now, as she talked to him — "I could not bear it, I could not forgive her!"

He only wished that she would give up talking about Wharton altogether. But, on the contrary, she would talk of him — and with a curious persistence. She must needs know what Hallin thought of his career in Parliament, of his prospects, of his powers as a speaker. Hallin answered shortly, like some one approached on a subject for which he cares nothing.

"Yet, of course, it is not that; it is injustice!" she said to herself, with vehemence. "He *must* care; they are his subjects, his interests too. But he will not look at it dispassionately, because —"

So they fell out with each other a little, and the talk dragged. Yet, all the while, Marcella's inner mind was conscious of quite different thoughts. How good it was to be here, in this room, beside these two people! She must show herself fractious and difficult

with Hallin sometimes; it was her nature. But in reality, that slight and fragile form, that spiritual presence were now shrined in the girl's eager reverence and affection. She felt towards him as many a Catholic has felt towards his director; though the hidden yearning to be led by him was often oddly covered, as now, by an outer self-assertion. Perhaps her quarrel with him was that he would not lead her enough — would not tell her precisely enough what she was to do with herself.

CHAPTER V.

WHILE she and Hallin were sitting thus, momentarily out of tune with each other, the silence was suddenly broken by a familiar voice.

"I say, Hallin — is this all right?"

The words came from a young man who, having knocked unheeded, opened the door, and cautiously put in a curly head.

"Frank! — is that you? Come in," cried Hallin, springing up.

Frank Leven came in, and at once perceived the lady sitting in the window.

"Well, I *am* glad!" he cried, striding across the room and shaking Hallin's hand by the way. "Miss Boyce! I thought none of your friends were ever going to get a sight of you again! Why, what — "

He drew back scanning her, a gay look of quizzing surprise on his fair boy's face.

"He expected me in cap and apron," said Marcella, laughing; "or means to pretend he did."

"I expected a sensation! And here you are, just as you were, only twice as — I say, Hallin, doesn't she look well!" — this in a stage aside to Hallin, while the speaker was drawing off his gloves, and still studying Marcella.

"Well, *I* think she looks tired," said Hallin, with a little attempt at a smile, but turning away. Every-

body felt a certain tension, a certain danger, even in the simplest words, and Miss Hallin's call to supper was very welcome.

The frugal meal went gaily. The chattering Christchurch boy brought to it a breath of happy, careless life, to which the three others — over-driven and over-pressed, all of them — responded with a kind of eagerness. Hallin especially delighted in him, and would have out all his budget — his peacock's pride at having been just put into the 'Varsity eleven, his cricket engagements for the summer, his rows with his dons, above all his lasting amazement that he should have just scraped through his Mods.

"I thought those Roman emperors would have done for me!" he declared, with a child's complacency. "*Brutes!* I couldn't remember them. I learnt them up and down, backwards and forwards — but it was no good; they nearly dished me!"

"Yet it comes back to me," said Hallin, slily, "that when a certain person was once asked to name the winner of the Derby in some obscure year, he began at the beginning, and gave us all of them, from first to last, without a hitch."

"The winner of the *Derby!*" said the lad, eagerly, bending forward with his hands on his knees; "why, I should rather think so! That isn't memory; that's *knowledge!* — Goodness! who's this?"

The last remark was addressed *sotto voce* to Marcella. Supper was just over, and the two guests, with Hallin, had returned to the window, while Miss Hallin, stoutly refusing their help, herself cleared the table and set all straight.

Hallin, hearing a knock, had gone to the door while Leven was speaking. Four men came crowding in, all of them apparently well known both to Hallin and his sister. The last two seemed to be workmen; the others were Bennett, Hallin's old and tried friend among the Labour-leaders, and Nehemiah Wilkins, M.P. Hallin introduced them all to Marcella and Leven; but the new-comers took little notice of any one but their host, and were soon seated about him discussing a matter already apparently familiar to them, and into which Hallin had thrown himself at once with that passionate directness which, in the social and speculative field, replaced his ordinary gentleness of manner. He seemed to be in strong disagreement with the rest — a disagreement which troubled himself and irritated them.

Marcella watched them with quick curiosity from the window where she was sitting, and would have liked to go forward to listen. But Frank Leven turned suddenly round upon her with sparkling eyes.

"Oh, I say! don't go. Do come and sit here with me a bit. Oh, isn't it rum! isn't it *rum!* Look at Hallin,— those are the people whom he *cares* to talk to. That's a shoemaker, that man to the left — really an awfully cute fellow — and this man in front, I think he told me he was a mason, a Socialist of course — would like to string *me* up to-morrow. Did you ever see such a countenance? Whenever that man begins, I think we must be precious near to shooting. And he's pious too, would pray over us first and shoot us afterwards — which isn't the case, I understand, with many of 'em. Then the others — you know

them? That's Bennett — regular good fellow — always telling his pals not to make fools of themselves — for which of course they love him no more than they are obliged — And Wilkins — oh! *Wilkins*" — he chuckled — "they say it'll come to a beautiful row in the House before they've done, between him and my charming cousin, Harry Wharton. My father says he backs Wilkins."

Then suddenly the lad recollected himself and his clear cheek coloured a little after a hasty glance at his companion. He fell to silence and looking at his boots. Marcella wondered what was the matter with him. Since her flight from Mellor she had lived, so to speak, with her head in the sand. She herself had never talked directly of her own affairs to anybody. Her sensitive pride did not let her realise that, notwithstanding, all the world was aware of them.

"I don't suppose you know much about your cousin!" she said to him with a little scorn.

"Well, I don't want to!" said the lad, "that's one comfort! But I don't know anything about anything! — Miss Boyce!"

He plunged his head in his hands, and Marcella, looking at him, saw at once that she was meant to understand she had woe and lamentation beside her.

Her black eyes danced with laughter. At Mellor she had been several times his confidante. The handsome lad was not apparently very fond of his sisters and had taken to her from the beginning. To-night she recognised the old symptoms.

"What, you have been getting into scrapes again?" she said — "how many since we met last?"

"There! you make fun of it!" he said indignantly from behind his fingers — "you're like all the rest."

Marcella teased him a little more till at last she was astonished by a flash of genuine wrath from the hastily uncovered eyes.

"If you're only going to chaff a fellow let's go over there and talk! And yet I did want to tell you about it — you were awfully kind to me down at home. I want to tell you — and I don't want to tell you — perhaps I *oughtn't* to tell you — you'll think me a brute, I dare say, an ungentlemanly brute for speaking of it at all — and yet somehow — "

The boy, crimson, bit his lips. Marcella, arrested and puzzled, laid a hand on his arm. She had been used to these motherly ways with him at Mellor, on the strength of her seniority, so inadequately measured by its two years or so of time!

"I won't laugh," she said, "tell me."

"No — really? — shall I?"

Whereupon there burst forth a history precisely similar it seemed to some half dozen others she had already heard from the same lips. A pretty girl — or rather "an *ex*quisite creature!" met at the house of some relation in Scotland, met again at the "Boats" at Oxford, and yet again at Commemoration balls, Nuneham picnics, and the rest; adored and adorable; yet, of course, a sphinx born for the torment of men, taking her haughty way over a prostrate sex, kind to-day, cruel to-morrow; not to be won by money, yet, naturally, not to be won without it; possessed like Rose Aylmer of "every virtue, every grace," whether of form or family; yet making nothing but

a devastating and death-dealing use of them — how familiar it all was! — and how many more of them there seemed to be in the world, on a man's reckoning, than on a woman's!

"And you know," said the lad, eagerly, "though she's so *frightfully* pretty — well, frightfully fetching, rather — and well dressed and all the rest of it, she isn't a bit silly, not one of your empty-headed girls — not she. She's read a *lot* of things — a lot! I'm sure, Miss Boyce" — he looked at her confidently,— "if *you* were to see her you'd think her awfully clever. And yet she's so little — and so dainty — and she dances — my goodness! you should see her dance, skirt-dance I mean — Letty Lind isn't in it! She's good too, awfully good. I think her mother's a most dreadful old bore — well, no, I didn't mean that — of course I didn't mean that! — but she's fussy, you know, and invalidy, and has to be wrapped up in shawls, and dragged about in bath chairs, and Betty's an angel to her — she is really — though her mother's always snapping her head off. And as to the *poor* —"

Something in his tone, in the way he had of fishing for her approval, sent Marcella into a sudden fit of laughter. Then she put out a hand to restrain this plunging lover.

"Look here — do come to the point — have you proposed to her?"

"I should rather think I have!" said the boy, fervently. "About once a week since Christmas. Of course she's played with me — that sort always does — but I think I might really have a chance with her, if it weren't for her mother — horrible old — no, of

course I don't mean that! But now it comes in — what I oughtn't to tell you — I *know* I oughtn't to tell you! I'm always making a beastly mess of it. It's because I can't help talking of it!"

And shaking his curly head in despair, he once more plunged his red cheeks into his hands and fell abruptly silent.

Marcella coloured for sympathy. "I really wish you wouldn't talk in riddles," she said. "What *is* the matter with you? — of course you must tell me."

"Well, I know you won't mind!" cried the lad, emerging. "As if you could mind! But it sounds like my impudence to be talking to you about — about — You see," he blurted out, "she's going to Italy with the Raeburns. She's a connection of theirs, somehow, and Miss Raeburn's taken a fancy to her lately — and her mother's treated me like dirt ever since they asked her to go to Italy — and naturally a fellow sees what *that* means — and what her mother's after. I don't believe Betty *would;* he's too old for her, isn't he? Oh, my goodness!" — this time he smote his knee in real desperation — "now I *have* done it. I'm simply *bursting* always with the thing I'd rather cut my head off than say. Why they make 'em like me I don't know!"

"You mean," said Marcella, with impatience — "that her mother wants her to marry Mr. Raeburn?"

He looked round at his companion. She was lying back in a deep chair, her hands lightly clasped on her knee. Something in her attitude, in the pose of the tragic head, in the expression of the face stamped to-night with a fatigue which was also a dignity,

struck a real compunction into his mood of vanity and excitement. He had simply not been able to resist the temptation to talk to her. She reminded him of the Raeburns, and the Raeburns were in his mind at the present moment by day and by night. He knew that he was probably doing an indelicate and indiscreet thing, but all the same his boyish egotism would not be restrained from the headlong pursuit of his own emotions. There was in him too such a burning curiosity as to how she would take it — what she would say.

Now however he felt a genuine shrinking. His look changed. Drawing his chair close up to her he began a series of penitent and self-contradictory excuses which Marcella soon broke in upon.

"I don't know why you talk like that," she said, looking at him steadily. "Do you suppose I can go on all my life without hearing Mr. Raeburn's name mentioned? And don't apologise so much! It really doesn't matter what I suppose — that *you* think — about my present state of mind. It is very simple. I ought never to have accepted Mr. Raeburn. I behaved badly. I know it — and everybody knows it. Still one has to go on living one's life somehow. The point is that I am rather the wrong person for you to come to just now, for if there is one thing I ardently wish about Mr. Raeburn, it is that he should get himself married."

Frank Leven looked at her in bewildered dismay.

"I never thought of that," he said.

"Well, you might, mightn't you?"

For another short space there was silence between

them, while the rush of talk in the centre of the room was still loud and unspent.

Then she rated herself for want of sympathy. Frank sat beside her shy and uncomfortable, his confidence chilled away.

"So you think Miss Raeburn has views?" she asked him, smiling, and in her most ordinary voice.

The boy's eye brightened again with the implied permission to go on chattering.

"I know she has! Betty's brother as good as told me that she and Mrs. Macdonald — that's Betty's mother — she hasn't got a father — had talked it over. And now Betty's going with them to Italy, and Aldous is going too for ten days — and when I go to the Macdonalds Mrs. Macdonald treats me as if I were a little chap in jackets, and Betty worries me to death. It's sickening!"

"And how about Mr. Raeburn?"

"Oh, Aldous seems to like her very much," he said despondently. "She's always teasing and amusing him. When she's there she never lets him alone. She harries him out. She makes him read to her and ride with her. She makes him discuss all sorts of things with her you'd *never* think Aldous would discuss — her lovers and her love affairs, and being in love! — it's extraordinary the way she drives him round. At Easter she and her mother were staying at the Court, and one night Betty told me she was bored to death. It was a very smart party, but everything was so flat and everybody was so dull. So she suddenly got up and ran across to Aldous. 'Now look here, Mr. Aldous,' she said; 'this'll never do! you've got to

come and dance with me, and *push* those chairs and tables aside' — I can fancy the little stamp she'd give — 'and make those other people dance too.' And she made him — she positively made him. Aldous declared he didn't dance, and she wouldn't have a word of it. And presently she got to all her tricks, skirt-dancing and the rest of it — and of course the evening went like smoke."

Marcella's eyes, unusually wide open, were somewhat intently fixed on the speaker.

"And Mr. Raeburn liked it?" she asked in a tone that sounded incredulous.

"Didn't he just? She told me they got regular close friends after that, and he told her everything — oh, well," said the lad, embarrassed, and clutching at his usual formula — "of course, I didn't mean that. And she's fearfully flattered, you can see she is, and she tells me that she adores him — that he's the only great man she's ever known — that I'm not fit to black his boots, and ought to be grateful whenever he speaks to me — and all that sort of rot. And now she's going off with them. I shall have to shoot myself — I declare I shall!"

"Well, not yet," said Marcella, in a soothing voice; "the case isn't clear enough. Wait till they come back. Shall we move? I'm going over there to listen to that talk. But — first — come and see me whenever you like — 3 to 4.30, Brown's Buildings, Maine Street — and tell me how this goes on?"

She spoke with a careless lightness, laughing at him with a half sisterly freedom. She had risen from her seat, and he, whose thoughts had been wrapped

up for months in one of the smallest of the sex, was suddenly struck with her height and stately gesture as she moved away from him.

"By Jove! Why didn't she stick to Aldous," he said to himself discontentedly as his eyes followed her. "It was only her cranks, and of course she'll get rid of *them*. Just like my luck!"

Meanwhile Marcella took a seat next to Miss Hallin, who looked up from her knitting to smile at her. The girl fell into the attitude of listening; but for some minutes she was not listening at all. She was reflecting how little men knew of each other! — even the most intimate friends — and trying to imagine what Aldous Raeburn would be like, married to such a charmer as Frank had sketched. His friendship for her meant, of course, the attraction of contraries — one of the most promising of all possible beginnings. On the whole, she thought Frank's chances were poor.

Then, unexpectedly, her ear was caught by Wharton's name, and she discovered that what was going on beside her was a passionate discussion of his present position and prospects in the Labour party — a discussion, however, mainly confined to Wilkins and the two workmen. Bennett had the air of the shrewd and kindly spectator who has his own reasons for treating a situation with reserve; and Hallin was lying back in his chair flushed and worn out. The previous debate, which had now merged in these questions of men and personalities, had made him miserable; he had no heart for anything more. Miss Hallin

observed him anxiously, and made restless movements now and then, as though she had it in her mind to send all her guests away.

The two Socialist workmen were talking strongly in favour of an organised and distinct Labour party, and of Wharton's leadership. They referred constantly to Parnell, and what he had done for "those Irish fellows." The only way to make Labour formidable in the House was to learn the lesson of Unionism and of Parnellism, to act together and strike together, to make of the party a "two-handed engine," ready to smite Tory and Liberal impartially. To this end a separate organisation, separate place in the House, separate Whips — they were ready, nay clamorous, for them all. And they were equally determined on Harry Wharton as a leader. They spoke of the *Clarion* with enthusiasm, and declared that its owner was already an independent power, and was, moreover, as "straight" as he was sharp.

The contention and the praise lashed Wilkins into fury. After making one or two visible efforts at a sarcastic self-control which came to nothing, he broke out into a flood of invective which left the rest of the room staring. Marcella found herself indignantly wondering who this big man, with his fierce eyes, long, puffy cheeks, coarse black hair, and North-country accent, might be. Why did he talk in this way, with these epithets, this venom? It was intolerable!

Hallin roused himself from his fatigue to play the peace-maker. But some of the things Wilkins had been saying had put up the backs of the two workmen, and the talk flamed up unmanageably — Wilkins's

dialect getting more pronounced with each step of the argument.

"Well, if I'd ever ha' thowt that I war coomin' to Lunnon to put myself and my party oonder the heel o' Muster Harry Wharton, I'd ha' stayed at *home,* I tell tha," cried Wilkins, slapping his knee. "If it's to be the People's party, why, in the name o' God, must yo put a yoong ripstitch like yon at the head of it? a man who'll just mak *use* of us all, you an' me, and ivery man Jack of us, for his own advancement, an' ull kick us down when he's done with us! Why shouldn't he? What is he? Is he a man of *us* — bone of our bone? He's a *landlord,* and an aristocrat, I tell tha! What have the likes of him ever been but thorns in our side? When have the landlords ever gone with the people? Have they not been the blight and the curse of the country for hun'erds of years? And you're goin' to tell me that a man bred out o' *them* — living on his rent and interest — grinding the faces of the poor, I'll be bound if the truth were known, as all the rest of them do — is goin' to lead *me,* an' those as'll act with me to the pullin' down of the landlords! Why are we to go lickspittlin' to any man of his sort to do our work for us? Let him go to his own class — I'm told Mr. Wharton is mighty fond of countesses, and they of him! — or let him set up as the friend of the working man just as he likes — I'm quite agreeable! — I shan't make any bones about takin' his *vote;* but I'm not goin' to make him master over me, and give him the right to speak for my mates in the House of Commons. I'd cut my hand off fust!"

Leven grinned in the background. Bennett lay back in his chair with a worried look. Wilkins's crudities were very distasteful to him both in and out of the House. The younger of the Socialist workmen, a mason, with a strong square face, incongruously lit somehow with the eyes of the religious dreamer, looked at Wilkins contemptuously.

"There's none of you in the House will take orders," he said quickly, "and that's the ruin of us. We all know that. Where do you think we'd have been in the struggle with the employers, if we'd gone about our business as you're going about yours in the House of Commons?"

"I'm not saying we shouldn't *organise*," said Wilkins, fiercely. "What I'm sayin' is, get a man of the working class — a man who has the *wants* of the working class — a man whom the working class can get a hold on — to do your business for you, and not any bloodsucking landlord or capitalist. It's a slap i' the face to ivery honest working man i' the coontry, to mak' a Labour party and put Harry Wharton at t' head of it!"

The young Socialist looked at him askance. "Of course you'd like it yourself!" was what he was thinking. "But they'll take a man as can hold his own with the swells — and quite right too!"

"And if Mr. Wharton *is* a landlord he's a good sort!" exclaimed the shoemaker — a tall, lean man in a well-brushed frock coat. "There's many on us knows as have been to hear him speak, what he's tried to do about the land, and the co-operative farming. E's *straight* is Mr. Wharton. We 'aven't got

Socialism yet — an' it isn't 'is fault bein' a landlord. Ee was born it."

"I tell tha he's playin' for his own hand!" said Wilkins, doggedly, the red spot deepening on his swarthy cheek — "he's runnin' that paper for his own hand — Haven't I had experience of him? I know it — And I'll prove it some day! He's one for featherin' his own nest is Mr. Wharton — and when he's doon it by makkin' fools of us, he'll leave us to whistle for any good we're iver likely to get out o' *him*. *He* go agen the landlords when it coom to the real toossle, — I know 'em — I tell tha — I know 'em!"

A woman's voice, clear and scornful, broke into the talk.

"It's a little strange to think, isn't it, that while we in London go on groaning and moaning about insanitary houses, and making our small attempts here and there, half of the country poor of England have been re-housed in our generation by these same landlords — no fuss about it — and rents for five-roomed cottages, somewhere about one and fourpence a week!"

Hallin swung his chair round and looked at the speaker — amazed!

Wilkins also stared at her under his eyebrows. He did not like women — least of all, ladies.

He gruffly replied that if they had done anything like as much as she said — which, he begged her pardon, but he didn't believe — it was done for the landlords' own purposes, either to buy off public opinion, or just for show and aggrandisement. People who had prize pigs and prize cattle must have prize

cottages of course — "with a race of slaves inside 'em!"

Marcella, bright-eyed, erect, her thin right hand hanging over her knee, went avengingly into facts — the difference between landlords' villages and "open" villages; the agrarian experiments made by different great landlords; the advantage to the community, even from the Socialist point of view of a system which had preserved the land in great blocks, for the ultimate use of the State, as compared with a system like the French, which had for ever made Socialism impossible.

Hallin's astonishment almost swept away his weariness.

"Where in the world did she get it all from, and is she standing on her head or am I?"

After an animated little debate, in which Bennett and the two workmen joined, while Wilkins sat for the most part in moody, contemptuous silence, and Marcella, her obstinacy roused, carried through her defence of the landlords with all a woman's love of emphasis and paradox, everybody rose simultaneously to say good-night.

"You ought to come and lead a debate down at our Limehouse club," said Bennett pleasantly to Marcella, as she held out her hand to him; "you'd take a lot of beating."

"Yet I'm a Venturist, you know," she said, laughing; "I *am*."

He shook his head, laughed too, and departed.

When the four had gone, Marcella turned upon Hallin.

"Are there many of these Labour members like *that?*"

Her tone was still vibrating and sarcastic.

"He's not much of a talker, our Nehemiah," said Hallin, smiling; "but he has the most extraordinary power as a speaker over a large popular audience that I have ever seen. The man's honesty is amazing, — it's his tempers and his jealousies get in his way. You astonished him; but, for the matter of that, you astonished Frank and me still more!"

And as he fell back into his chair, Marcella caught a flash of expression, a tone that somehow put her on her defence.

"I was not going to listen to such unjust stuff without a word. Politics is one thing — slanderous abuse is another!" she said, throwing back her head with a gesture which instantly brought back to Hallin the scene in the Mellor drawing-room, when she had denounced the game-laws and Wharton had scored his first point.

He was silent, feeling a certain inner exasperation with women and their ways.

"'She only did it to annoy,'" cried Frank Leven; "'because she knows it teases.' *We* know very well what she thinks of us. But where did you get it all from, Miss Boyce? I just wish you'd tell me. There's a horrid Radical in the House I'm always having rows with — and upon my word I didn't know there was half so much to be said for us!"

Marcella flushed.

"Never mind where I got it!" she said.

In reality, of course, it was from those Agricultural

Reports she had worked through the year before under Wharton's teaching, with so much angry zest, and to such different purpose.

When the door closed upon her and upon Frank Leven, who was to escort her home, Hallin walked quickly over to the table, and stood looking for a moment in a sort of bitter reverie at Raeburn's photograph.

His sister followed him, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Do go to bed, Edward! I am afraid that talk has tired you dreadfully."

"It would be no good going to bed, dear," he said, with a sigh of exhaustion. "I will sit and read a bit, and see if I can get myself into sleeping trim. But you go, Alice — good-night."

When she had gone he threw himself into his chair again with the thought — "She must contradict here as she contradicted there! *She* — and justice! If she could have been just to a landlord for one hour last year —"

He spent himself for a while in endless chains of recollection, oppressed by the clearness of his own brain, and thirsting for sleep. Then from the affairs of Raeburn and Marcella, he passed with a fresh sense of strain and effort to his own. That discussion with those four men which had filled the first part of the evening weighed upon him in his weakness of nerve, so that suddenly in the phantom silence of the night, all life became an oppression and a terror, and rest, either to-night or in the future, a thing never to be his.

He had come to the moment of difficulty, of tragedy, in a career which so far, in spite of all drawbacks of physical health and cramped activities, had been one of singular happiness and success. Ever since he had discovered his own gifts as a lecturer to working men, content, cheerfulness, nay, a passionate interest in every hour, had been quite compatible for him with all the permanent limitations of his lot. The study of economical and historical questions; the expression through them of such a hunger for the building of a "city of God" among men, as few are capable of; the evidence not to be ignored even by his modesty, and perpetually forthcoming over a long period of time, that he had the power to be loved, the power to lead, among those toilers of the world on whom all his thoughts centred — these things had been his joy, and had led him easily through much self-denial to the careful husbanding of every hour of strength and time in the service of his ideal end.

And now he had come upon opposition — the first cooling of friendships, the first distrust of friends that he had ever known.

Early in the spring of this year a book called *To-morrow and the Land* had appeared in London, written by a young London economist of great ability, and dealing with the nationalisation of the land. It did not offer much discussion of the general question, but it took up the question as it affected England specially and London in particular. It showed — or tried to show — in picturesque detail what might be the consequences for English rural or municipal life of throwing all land into a common or national stock,

of expropriating the landlords, and transferring all rent to the people, to the effacement of taxation and the indefinite enrichment of the common lot. The book differed from *Progress and Poverty*, which also powerfully and directly affected the English working class, in that it suggested a financial scheme, of great apparent simplicity and ingenuity, for the compensation of the landlords; it was shorter, and more easily to be grasped by the average working man; and it was written in a singularly crisp and taking style, and — by the help of a number of telling illustrations borrowed directly from the circumstances of the larger English towns, especially of London — treated with abundant humour.

The thing had an enormous success — in popular phrase, "caught on." Soon Hallin found, that all the more active and intelligent spirits in the working-class centres where he was in vogue as a lecturer were touched — nay, possessed — by it. The crowd of more or less socialistic newspapers which had lately sprung up in London were full of it; the working men's clubs rang with it. It seemed to him a madness — an infection; and it spread like one. The book had soon reached an immense sale, and was in every one's hands.

To Hallin, a popular teacher, interested above all in the mingled problems of ethics and economics, such an incident was naturally of extreme importance. But he was himself opposed by deepest conviction, intellectual and moral, to the book and its conclusions. The more its success grew, the more eager and passionate became his own desire to battle with it. His platform, of course, was secured to him; his openings

many. Hundreds and thousands of men all over England were keen to know what he had to say about the new phenomenon.

And he had been saying his say — throwing into it all his energies, all his finest work. With the result that — for the first time in eleven years — he felt his position in the working-class movement giving beneath his feet, and his influence beginning to drop from his hand. Coldness in place of enthusiasm; critical aloofness in place of affection; readiness to forget and omit him in matters where he had always hitherto belonged to the inner circle and the trusted few — these bitter ghosts, with their hard, unfamiliar looks, had risen of late in his world of idealist effort and joy, and had brought with them darkness and chill. He could not give way, for he had a singular unity of soul — it had been the source of his power — and every economical or social conviction was in some way bound up with the moral and religious passion which was his being — his inmost nature. And his sensitive state of nerve and brain, his anchorite's way of life, did not allow him the distractions of other men. The spread of these and other similar ideas seemed to him a question of the future of England; and he had already begun to throw himself into the unequal struggle with a martyr's tenacity, and with some prescience of the martyr's fate.

Even Bennett! As he sat there alone in the dim lamp-light, his head bent over his knees, his hands hanging loosely before him, he thought bitterly of the defection of that old friend who had stood by him through so many lesser contests. It was *impossible*

that Bennett should think the schemes of that book feasible! Yet he was one of the honestest of men, and, within a certain range, one of the most clear-headed. As for the others, they had been all against him. Intellectually, their opinion did not matter to him; but morally it was so strange to him to find himself on the side of doubt and dissent, while all his friends were talking language which was almost the language of a new faith!

He had various lecturing engagements ahead, connected with this great debate which was now surging throughout the Labour world of London. He had accepted them with eagerness; in these weary night hours he looked forward to them with terror, seeing before him perpetually thousands of hostile faces, living in a nightmare of lost sympathies and broken friendships. Oh, for *sleep* — for the power to rest — to escape this corrosion of an ever active thought, which settled and reconciled nothing!

"*The tragedy of life lies in the conflict between the creative will of man and the hidden wisdom of the world, which seems to thwart it.*" These words, written by one whose thought had penetrated deep into his own, rang in his ears as he sat brooding there. Not the hidden fate, or the hidden evil, but the hidden *wisdom*. Could one die and still believe it? Yet what else was the task of faith?

CHAPTER VI.

"So I understand you wish me to go down at once?" said Louis Craven. "This is Friday — say Monday?"

Wharton nodded. He and Craven were sitting in Marcella's little sitting-room. Their hostess and Edith Craven had escaped through the door in the back kitchen communicating with the Hurds' tenement, so that the two men might be left alone a while. The interview between them had gone smoothly, and Louis Craven had accepted immediate employment on the *Labour Clarion*, as the paper's correspondent in the Midlands, with special reference to the important strike just pending. Wharton, whose tendency in matters of business was always to go rather further than he had meant to go, for the sake generally of making an impression on the man with whom he was dealing, had spoken of a two years' engagement, and had offered two hundred a year. So far as that went, Craven was abundantly satisfied.

"And I understand from you," he said, "that the paper *goes in* for the strike, that you will fight it through?"

He fixed his penetrating greenish eyes on his companion. Louis Craven was now a tall man with narrow shoulders, a fine oval head and face, delicate features, and a nervous look of short sight, producing in appearance and manner a general impression of thin grace and of a courtesy which was apt to pass unac-

countably into sarcasm. Wharton had never felt himself personally at ease with him, either now, or in the old days of Venturist debates.

"Certainly, we shall fight it through," Wharton replied, with emphasis — "I have gone through the secretary's statement, which I now hand over to you, and I never saw a clearer case. The poor wretches have been skinned too long; it is high time the public backed them up. There are two of the masters in the House. Denny, I should say, belonged quite to the worst type of employer going."

He spoke with light venom, buttoning his coat as he spoke with the air of the busy public man who must not linger over an appointment.

"Oh! Denny!" said Craven, musing; "yes, Denny is a hard man, but a just one according to his lights. There are plenty worse than he."

Wharton was disagreeably reminded of the Venturist habit of never accepting anything that was said quite as it stood — of not, even in small things, "swearing to the words" of anybody. He was conscious of the quick passing feeling that his judgment, with regard to Denny, ought to have been enough for Craven.

"One thing more," said Craven suddenly, as Wharton looked for his stick — "you see there is talk of arbitration."

"Oh yes, I know!" said Wharton impatiently; "a mere blind. The men have been done by it twice before. They get some big-wig from the neighbourhood — not in the trade, indeed, but next door to it — and, of course, the award goes against the men."

"Then the paper will not back arbitration?"

Craven took out a note-book.

"No! — The quarrel itself is as plain as a pike-staff. The men are asking for a mere pittance, and must get it if they are to live. It's like all these home industries, abominably ground down. We must go for them! I mean to go for them hot and strong. Poor devils! did you read the evidence in that Blue-book last year? Arbitration? no, indeed! let them live first!"

Craven looked up absently.

"And I think," he said, "you gave me Mr. Thorpe's address?" Mr. Thorpe was the secretary.

Again Wharton gulped down his annoyance. If he chose to be expansive, it was not for Craven to take no notice.

Craven, however, except in print, where he could be as vehement as anybody else, never spoke but in the driest way of those workman's grievances, which in reality burnt at the man's heart. A deep disdain for what had always seemed to him the cheapest form of self-advertisement, held him back. It was this dryness, combined with an amazing disinterestedness, which had so far stood in his way.

Wharton repeated the address, following it up by some rather curt directions as to the length and date of articles, to which Craven gave the minutest attention.

"May we come in?" said Marcella's voice.

"By all means," said Wharton, with a complete change of tone. "Business is up and I am off!"

He took up his hat as he spoke.

"Not at all! Tea is just coming, without which no guest departs," said Marcella, taking as she spoke a little tray from the red-haired Daisy who followed her, and motioning to the child to bring the tea-table.

Wharton looked at her irresolute. He had spent half an hour with her *tête-à-tête* before Louis Craven arrived, and he was really due at the House. But now that she was on the scene again, he did not find it so easy to go away. How astonishingly beautiful she was, even in this disguise! She wore her nurse's dress; for her second daily round began at half-past four, and her cloak, bonnet, and bag were lying ready on a chair beside her. The dress was plain brown holland, with collar and armlets of white linen; but, to Wharton's eye, the dark Italian head, and the long slenderness of form had never shown more finely. He hesitated and stayed.

"All well?" said Marcella, in a half whisper, as she passed Louis Craven on her way to get some cake.

He nodded and smiled, and she went back to the tea-table with an eye all gaiety, pleased with herself and everybody else.

The quarter of an hour that followed went agreeably enough. Wharton sat among the little group, far too clever to patronise a cat, let alone a Venturist, but none the less master and conscious master of the occasion, because it suited him to take the airs of equality. Craven said little, but as he lounged in Marcella's long cane chair with his arms behind his head, his serene and hazy air showed him contented; and Marcella talked and laughed with the animation that belongs to one whose plots for improving the

universe have at least temporarily succeeded. Or did it betray, perhaps, a woman's secret consciousness of some presence beside her, more troubling and magnetic to her than others?

"Well then, Friday," said Wharton at last, when his time was more than spent. "You must be there early, for there will be a crush. Miss Craven comes too? Excellent! I will tell the doorkeeper to look out for you. Good-bye! — good-bye!"

And with a hasty shake of the hand to the Cravens, and one more keen glance, first at Marcella and then round the little workman's room in which they had been sitting, he went.

He had hardly departed before Anthony Craven, the lame elder brother, who must have passed him on the stairs, appeared.

"Well — any news?" he said, as Marcella found him a chair.

"All right!" said Louis, whose manner had entirely changed since Wharton had left the room. "I am to go down on Monday to report the Damesley strike that is to be. A month's trial, and then a salary — two hundred a year. Oh! it'll do."

He fidgeted and looked away from his brother, as though trying to hide his pleasure. But in spite of him it transformed every line of the pinched and worn face.

"And you and Anna will walk to the Registry Office next week?" said Anthony, sourly, as he took his tea.

"It can't be next week," said Edith Craven's quiet voice, interposing. "Anna's got to work out her shirt-making time. She only left the tailoresses and began

this new business ten days ago. And she was to have a month at each."

Marcella's lifted eyebrows asked for explanations. She had not yet seen Louis's betrothed, but she was understood to be a character, and a better authority on many Labour questions than he.

Louis explained that Anna was exploring various sweated trades for the benefit of an East End newspaper. She had earned fourteen shillings her last week at tailoring, but the feat had exhausted her so much that he had been obliged to insist on two or three days respite before moving on to shirts. Shirts were now brisk, and the hours appallingly long in this heat.

"It was on shirts they made acquaintance," said Edith pensively. "Louis was lodging on the second floor, she in the third floor back, and they used to pass on the stairs. One day she heard him imploring the little slavey to put some buttons on his shirts. The slavey tossed her head, and said she'd see about it. When he'd gone out, Anna came downstairs, calmly demanded his shirts, and, having the slavey under her thumb, got them, walked off with them, and mended them all. When Louis came home he discovered a neat heap reposing on his table. Of course he wept — whatever he may say. But next morning Miss Anna found her shoes outside her door, blacked as they had never been blacked before, with a note inside one of them. Affecting! wasn't it? Thenceforward, as long as they remained in those lodgings, Anna mended and Louis blacked. Naturally, Anthony and I drew our conclusions."

Marcella laughed.

"You must bring her to see me," she said to Louis.

"I will," said Louis, with some perplexity; "if I can get hold of her. But when she isn't stitching she's writing, or trying to set up Unions. She does the work of six. She'll earn nearly as much as I do when we're married. Oh! we shall swim!"

Anthony surveyed his radiant aspect — so unlike the gentle or satirical detachment which made his ordinary manner — with a darkening eye, as though annoyed by his effusion.

"Two hundred a year?" he said slowly; "about what Mr. Harry Wharton spends on his clothes, I should think. The Labour men tell me he is superb in that line. And for the same sum that he spends on his clothes, he is able to buy *you*, Louis, body and soul, and you seem inclined to be grateful."

"Never mind," said Louis recklessly. "He didn't buy some one else — and I *am* grateful!"

"No; by Heaven, you shan't be!" said Anthony, with a fierce change of tone. "*You* the dependent of that charlatan! I don't know how I'm to put up with it. You know very well what I think of him, and of your becoming dependent on him."

Marcella gave an angry start. Louis protested.

"Nonsense!" said Anthony doggedly; "you'll have to bear it from me, I tell you — unless you muzzle me too with an Anna."

"But I don't see why *I* should bear it," said Marcella, turning upon him. "I think you know that I owe Mr. Wharton a debt. Please remember it!"

Anthony looked at her an instant in silence. A

question crossed his mind concerning her. Then he made her a little clumsy bow.

"I am dumb," he said. "My manners, you perceive, are what they always were."

"What do you mean by such a remark," cried Marcella, fuming. "How can a man who has reached the position he has in so short a time — in so many different worlds — be disposed of by calling him an ugly name? It is more than unjust — it is absurd! Besides, what can you know of him?"

"You forget," said Anthony, as he calmly helped himself to more bread and butter, "that it is some three years since Master Harry Wharton joined the Venturists and began to be heard of at all. I watched his beginnings, and if I didn't know him well, my friends and Louis's did. And most of them — as he knows! — have pretty strong opinions by now about the man."

"Come, come, Anthony!" said Louis, "nobody expects a man of that type to be the pure-eyed patriot. But neither you nor I can deny that he has done some good service. Am I asked to take him to my bosom? Not at all! He proposes a job to me, and offers to pay me. I like the job, and mean to use him and his paper, both to earn some money that I want, and do a bit of decent work."

"*You* — use Harry Wharton!" said the cripple, with a sarcasm that brought the colour to Louis's thin cheek and made Marcella angrier than before. She saw nothing in his attack on Wharton, except personal prejudice and ill-will. It was natural enough, that a man of Anthony Craven's type — poor, unsuc-

cessful, and embittered — should dislike a popular victorious personality.

"Suppose we leave Mr. Wharton alone?" she said with emphasis, and Anthony, making her a little proud gesture of submission, threw himself back in his chair, and was silent.

It had soon become evident to Marcella, upon the renewal of her friendship with the Cravens, that Anthony's temper towards all men, especially towards social reformers and politicians, had developed into a mere impotent bitterness. While Louis had renounced his art, and devoted himself to journalism, unpaid public work and starvation, that he might so throw himself the more directly into the Socialist battle, Anthony had remained an artist, mainly employed as before in decorative design. Yet he was probably the more fierce Venturist and anticapitalist of the two. Only what with Louis was an intoxication of hope, was on the whole with Anthony a counsel of despair. He loathed wealth more passionately than ever; but he believed less in the working man, less in his kind. Rich men must cease to exist; but the world on any terms would probably remain a sorry spot.

In the few talks that he had had with Marcella since she left the hospital, she had allowed him to gather more or less clearly — though with hardly a mention of Aldous Raeburn's name — what had happened to her at Mellor. Anthony Craven thought out the story for himself, finding it a fit food for a caustic temper. Poor devil — the lover! To fall a victim to enthusiasms so raw, so unprofitable from any point of view, was hard. And as to this move to London, he

thought he foresaw the certain end of it. At any rate he believed in her no more than before. But her beauty was more marked than ever, and would, of course, be the dominant factor in her fate. He was thankful, at any rate, that Louis in this two years' interval had finally transferred his heart elsewhere.

After watching his three companions for a while, he broke in upon their chat with an abrupt—

"What *is* this job, Louis?"

"I told you. I am to investigate, report, and back up the Damesley strike, or rather the strike that begins at Damesley next week."

"No chance!" said Anthony shortly, "the masters are too strong. I had a talk with Denny yesterday."

The Denny he meant, however, was not Wharton's colleague in the House, but his son — a young man who, beginning life as the heir of one of the most stiff-backed and autocratic of capitalists, had developed socialist opinions, renounced his father's allowance, and was now a member of the "intellectual proletariat," as they have been called, the free-lances of the Collectivist movement. He had lately joined the Venturists. Anthony had taken a fancy to him. Louis as yet knew little or nothing of him.

"Ah, well!" he said, in reply to his brother, "I don't know. I think the *Clarion can* do something. The press grows more and more powerful in these things."

And he repeated some of the statements that Wharton had made — that Wharton always did make, in talking of the *Clarion* — as to its growth under his hands, and increasing influence in Labour disputes.

"Bunkum!" interrupted Anthony drily; "pure bunkum! My own belief is that the *Clarion* is a rotten property, and that he knows it!"

At this both Marcella and Louis laughed out. Extravagance after a certain point becomes amusing. They dropped their vexation, and Anthony for the next ten minutes had to submit to the part of the fractious person whom one humours but does not argue with. He accepted the part, saying little, his eager, feverish eyes, full of hostility, glancing from one to the other.

However, at the end, Marcella bade him a perfectly friendly farewell. It was always in her mind that Anthony Craven was lame and solitary, and her pity no less than her respect for him had long since yielded him the right to be rude.

"How are you getting on?" he said to her abruptly as he dropped her hand.

"Oh, very well! my superintendent leaves me almost alone now, which is a compliment. There is a parish doctor who calls me 'my good woman,' and a sanitary inspector who tells me to go to him whenever I want advice. Those are my chief grievances, I think."

"And you are as much in love with the poor as ever?"

She stiffened at the note of sarcasm, and a retaliatory impulse made her say: —

"I see a great deal more happiness than I expected."

He laughed.

"How like a woman! A few ill-housed villagers made you a democrat. A few well-paid London artisans will carry you safely back to your class. Your people were wise to let you take this work."

"Do you suppose I nurse none but well-paid artisans?" she asked him, mocking. "And I didn't say 'money' or 'comfort,' did I? but 'happiness.' As for my 'democracy,' you are not perhaps the best judge."

She stood resting both hands on a little table behind her, in an attitude touched with the wild freedom which best became her, a gleam of storm in her great eyes.

"Why are you still a Venturist?" he asked her abruptly.

"Because I have every right to be! I joined a society, pledged to work 'for a better future.' According to my lights, I do what poor work I can in that spirit."

"You are not a Socialist. Half the things you say, or imply, show it. And we *are* Socialists."

She hesitated, looking at him steadily.

"No! — so far as Socialism means a political system — the trampling out of private enterprise and competition, and all the rest of it — I find myself slipping away from it more and more. No! — as I go about among these wage-earners, the emphasis — do what I will — comes to lie less and less on possession — more and more on character. I go to two tenements in the same building. One is Hell — the other Heaven. Why? Both belong to well-paid artisans with equal opportunities. Both, so far as I can see, might have a decent and pleasant life of it. But one is a man — the other, with all his belongings, will soon be a vagabond. That is not all, I know — oh! don't trouble to tell me so! — but it is more than I thought. No! —

my sympathies in this district where I work are not so much with the Socialists that I know here — saving your presence! but — with the people, for instance, that slave at Charity Organisation! and get all the abuse from all sides."

Anthony laughed scornfully.

"It is always the way with a woman," he said; "she invariably prefers the tinkers to the reformers."

"And as to your Socialism," she went on, unheeding, the thought of many days finding defiant expression — "it seems to me like all other interesting and important things — destined to help something else! Christianity begins with the poor and division of goods — it becomes the great bulwark of property and the feudal state. The Crusades — they set out to recover the tomb of the Lord! — what they did was to increase trade and knowledge. And so with Socialism. It talks of a new order — what it *will* do is to help to make the old sound!"

Anthony clapped her ironically.

"Excellent! When the Liberty and Property Defence people have got hold of you — ask me to come and hear!"

Meanwhile, Louis stood behind, with his hands on his sides, a smile in his blinking eyes. He really had a contempt for what a handsome half-taught girl of twenty-three might think. Anthony only pretended or desired to have it.

Nevertheless, Louis said good-bye to his hostess with real, and, for him, rare effusion. Two years before, for the space of some months, he had been in love with her. That she had never responded with anything warmer

than liking and comradeship he knew; and his Anna now possessed him wholly. But there was a deep and gentle chivalry at the bottom of all his stern social faiths; and the woman towards whom he had once felt as he had towards Marcella Boyce could never lose the glamour lent her by that moment of passionate youth. And now, so kindly, so eagerly! — she had given him his Anna.

When they were all gone Marcella threw herself into her chair a moment to think. Her wrath with Anthony was soon dismissed. But Louis's thanks had filled her with delicious pleasure. Her cheek, her eye had a child's brightness. The old passion for ruling and influencing was all alive and happy.

"I will see it is all right," she was saying to herself. "I will look after them."

What she meant was, "I will see that Mr. Wharton looks after them!" and through the link of thought, memory flew quickly back to that *tête-à-tête* with him which had preceded the Cravens' arrival.

How changed he was, yet how much the same! He had not sat beside her for ten minutes before each was once more vividly, specially conscious of the other. She felt in him the old life and daring, the old imperious claim to confidence, to intimacy — on the other hand a new atmosphere, a new gravity, which suggested growing responsibilities, the difficulties of power, a great position — everything fitted to touch such an imagination as Marcella's, which, whatever its faults, was noble, both in quality and range. The brow beneath the bright chestnut curls had gained lines that pleased her — lines that a woman marks, because she thinks they mean experience and mastery.

Altogether, to have met him again was pleasure; to think of him was pleasure; to look forward to hearing him speak in Parliament was pleasure; so too was his new connection with her old friends. And a pleasure which took nothing from self-respect; which was open, honourable, eager. As for that ugly folly of the past, she frowned at the thought of it, only to thrust the remembrance passionately away. That *he* should remember or allude to it, would put an end to friendship. Otherwise friends they would and should be; and the personal interest in his public career should lift her out of the cramping influences that flow from the perpetual commerce of poverty and suffering. Why not? Such equal friendships between men and women grow more possible every day. While, as for Hallin's distrust, and Anthony Craven's jealous hostility, why should a third person be bound by either of them? Could any one suppose that such a temperament as Wharton's would be congenial to Hallin or to Craven — or — to yet another person, of whom she did not want to think? Besides, who wished to make a hero of him? It was the very complexity and puzzle of the character that made its force.

So with a reddened cheek, she lost herself a few minutes in this pleasant sense of a new wealth in life; and was only roused from the dreamy running to and fro of thought by the appearance of Minta, who came to clear away the tea.

"Why, it is close on the half-hour!" cried Marcella, springing up. "Where are my things?"

She looked down the notes of her cases, satisfied

herself that her bag contained all she wanted, and then hastily tied on her bonnet and cloak.

Suddenly — the room was empty, for Minta had just gone away with the tea — by a kind of subtle reaction, the face in that photograph on Hallin's table flashed into her mind — its look — the grizzled hair. With an uncontrollable pang of pain she dropped her hands from the fastenings of her cloak, and wrung them together in front of her — a dumb gesture of contrition and of grief.

She! — she talk of social reform and "character," she give her opinion, as of right, on points of speculation and of ethics, she, whose main achievement so far had been to make a good man suffer! Something belittling and withering swept over all her estimate of herself, all her pleasant self-conceit. Quietly, with downcast eyes, she went her way.

CHAPTER VII.

Her first case was in Brown's Buildings itself — a woman suffering from bronchitis and heart complaint, and tormented besides by an ulcerated foot which Marcella had now dressed daily for some weeks. She lived on the top floor of one of the easterly blocks, with two daughters and a son of eighteen.

When Marcella entered the little room it was as usual spotlessly clean and smelt of flowers. The windows were open, and a young woman was busy shirt-ironing on a table in the centre of the room. Both she and her mother looked up with smiles as Marcella entered. Then they introduced her with some ceremony to a "lady," who was sitting beside the patient, a long-faced melancholy woman employed at the moment in marking linen handkerchiefs, which she did with extraordinary fineness and delicacy. The patient and her daughter spoke of Marcella to their friend as "the young person," but all with a natural courtesy and charm that could not have been surpassed.

Marcella knelt to undo the wrappings of the foot. The woman, a pale transparent creature, winced painfully as the dressing was drawn off; but between each half stifled moan of pain she said something eager and grateful to her nurse. "I never knew any one, Nurse, do it as gentle as you — " or — "I *do* take it kind of

you, Nurse, to do it so *slow* — oh! there were a young person before you —" or "hasn't she got nice hands, Mrs. Burton? they don't never seem to *jar* yer."

"Poor foot! but I think it is looking better," said Marcella, getting up at last from her work, when all was clean and comfortable and she had replaced the foot on the upturned wooden box that supported it — for its owner was not in bed, but sitting propped up in an old armchair. "And how is your cough, Mrs. Jervis?"

"Oh! it's very bad, nights," said Mrs. Jervis, mildly — "disturbs Emily dreadful. But I always pray every night, when she lifts me into bed, as I may be took before the morning, an' God ull do it soon."

"Mother!" cried Emily, pausing in her ironing, "you know you oughtn't to say them things."

Mrs. Jervis looked at her with a sly cheerfulness. Her emaciated face was paler than usual because of the pain of the dressing, but from the frail form there breathed an indomitable air of *life*, a gay courage indeed which had already struck Marcella with wonder.

"Well, yer not to take 'em to heart, Em'ly. It ull be when it will be — for the Lord likes us to pray, but He'll take his own time — an' she's got troubles enough of her own, Nurse. D'yer see as she's leff off her ring?"

Marcella looked at Emily's left hand, while the girl flushed all over, and ironed with a more fiery energy than before.

"I've 'eerd such things of 'im, Nurse, this last two days," she said with low vehemence — "as I'm *never* goin' to wear it again. It 'ud burn me!"

Emily was past twenty. Some eighteen months before this date she had married a young painter. After nearly a year of incredible misery her baby was born. It died, and she very nearly died also, owing to the brutal ill-treatment of her husband. As soon as she could get on her feet again, she tottered home to her widowed mother, broken for the time in mind and body, and filled with loathing of her tyrant. He made no effort to recover her, and her family set to work to mend if they could what he had done. The younger sister of fourteen was earning seven shillings a week at paper-bag making; the brother, a lad of eighteen, had been apprenticed by his mother, at the cost of heroic efforts some six years before, to the leather-currying trade, in a highly skilled branch of it, and was now taking sixteen shillings a week with the prospect of far better things in the future. He at once put aside from his earnings enough to teach Emily "the shirt-ironing," denying himself every indulgence till her training was over.

Then they had their reward. Emily's colour and spirits came back; her earnings made all the difference to the family between penury and ease; while she and her little sister kept the three tiny rooms in which they lived, and waited on their invalid mother, with exquisite cleanliness and care.

Marcella stood by the ironing-table a moment after the girl's speech.

"Poor Emily!" she said softly, laying her hand on the ringless one that held down the shirt on the board.

Emily looked up at her in silence. But the girl's

eyes glowed with things unsaid and inexpressible — the "eternal passion, eternal pain," which in half the human race have no voice.

"He was a very rough man was Em'ly's husband," said Mrs. Jervis, in her delicate thoughtful voice — "a very uncultivated man."

Marcella turned round to her, startled and amused by the adjective. But the other two listeners took it quite quietly. It seemed to them apparently to express what had to be said.

"It's a sad thing is want of edication," Mrs. Jervis went on in the same tone. "Now there's that lady there" — with a little courtly wave of her hand towards Mrs. Burton — "she can't read yer know, Nurse, and I'm that sorry for her! But I've been reading to her, an' Emily — just while my cough's quiet — one of my ole tracks."

She held up a little paper-covered tract worn with use. It was called "A Pennorth of Grace, or a Pound of Works?" Marcella looked at it in respectful silence as she put on her cloak. Such things were not in her line.

"I do *love* a track!" said Mrs. Jervis, pensively. "That's why I don't like these buildings so well as them others, Em'ly. Here you never get no tracks; and there, what with one person and another, there was a new one most weeks. But" — her voice dropped, and she looked timidly first at her friend, and then at Marcella — "she isn't a Christian, Nurse. Isn't it sad?"

Mrs. Burton, a woman of a rich mahogany complexion, with a black "front," and a mouth which

turned down decisively at the corners, looked up from her embroidery with severe composure.

"No, Nurse, I'm not a Christian," she said in the tone of one stating a disagreeable fact for which they are noways responsible. "My brother is — and my sisters — real good Christian people. One of my sisters married a gentleman up in Wales. She 'as two servants, an' fam'ly prayers reg'lar. But I've never felt no 'call,' and I tell 'em I can't purtend. An' Mrs. Jervis here, she don't seem to make me see it no different."

She held her head erect, however, as though the unusually high sense of probity involved, was, after all, some consolation. Mrs. Jervis looked at her with pathetic eyes. But Emily coloured hotly. Emily was a churchwoman.

"Of course you're a Christian, Mrs. Burton," she said indignantly. "What she means, Nurse, is she isn't a 'member' of any chapel, like mother. But she's been baptised and confirmed, for I asked her. And of course she's a Christian."

"Em'ly!" said Mrs. Jervis, with energy.

Emily looked round trembling. The delicate invalid was sitting bolt upright, her eyes sparkling, a spot of red on either hollow cheek. The glances of the two women crossed; there seemed to be a mute struggle between them. Then Emily laid down her iron, stepped quickly across to her mother, and kneeling beside her, threw her arms around her.

"Have it your own way, mother," she said, while her lip quivered; "I wasn't a-goin' to cross you."

Mrs. Jervis laid her waxen cheek against her

daughter's tangle of brown hair with a faint smile, while her breathing, which had grown quick and panting, gradually subsided. Emily looked up at Marcella with a terrified self-reproach. They all knew that any sudden excitement might kill out the struggling flame of life.

"You ought to rest a little, Mrs. Jervis," said Marcella, with gentle authority. "You know the dressing must tire you, though you won't confess it. Let me put you comfortable. There; aren't the pillows easier so? Now rest — and good-bye."

But Mrs. Jervis held her, while Emily slipped away.

"I shall rest soon," she said significantly. "An' it hurts me when Emily talks like that. It's the only thing that ever comes atween us. She thinks o' forms an' ceremonies; an' *I* think o' *grace*."

Her old woman's eyes, so clear and vivid under the blanched brow, searched Marcella's face for sympathy. But Marcella stood, shy and wondering in the presence of words and emotions she understood so little. So narrow a life, in these poor rooms, under these crippling conditions of disease! — and all this preoccupation with, this passion over, the things not of the flesh, the thwarted, cabined flesh, but of the spirit — wonderful!

On coming out from Brown's Buildings, she turned her steps reluctantly towards a street some distance from her own immediate neighbourhood, where she had a visit to pay which filled her with repulsion and an unusual sense of helplessness. A clergyman who

often availed himself of the help of the St. Martin's nurses had asked the superintendent to undertake for him "a difficult case." Would one of their nurses go regularly to visit a certain house, ostensibly for the sake of a little boy of five just come back from the hospital, who required care at home for a while, *really* for the sake of his young mother, who had suddenly developed drinking habits and was on the road to ruin?

Marcella happened to be in the office when the letter arrived. She somewhat unwillingly accepted the task, and she had now paid two or three visits, always dressing the child's sore leg, and endeavouring to make acquaintance with the mother. But in this last attempt she had not had much success. Mrs. Vincent was young and pretty, with a flighty, restless manner. She was always perfectly civil to Marcella, and grateful to her apparently for the ease she gave the boy. But she offered no confidences; the rooms she and her husband occupied showed them to be well-to-do; Marcella had so far found them well-kept; and though the evil she was sent to investigate was said to be notorious, she had as yet discovered nothing of it for herself. It seemed to her that she must be either stupid, or that there must be something about her which made Mrs. Vincent more secretive with her than with others; and neither alternative pleased her.

To-day, however, as she stopped at the Vincents' door, she noticed that the doorstep, which was as a rule shining white, was muddy and neglected. Then nobody came to open, though she knocked and rang repeatedly. At last a neighbour, who had been

watching the strange nurse through her own parlour window, came out to the street.

"I think, miss," she said, with an air of polite mystery, "as you'd better walk in. Mrs. Vincent 'asn't been enjyin' very good 'ealth this last few days."

Marcella turned the handle, found it yielded, and went in. It was after six o'clock, and the evening sun streamed in through a door at the back of the house. But in the Vincents' front parlour the blinds were all pulled down, and the only sound to be heard was the fretful wailing of a child. Marcella timidly opened the sitting-room door.

The room at first seemed to her dark. Then she perceived Mrs. Vincent sitting by the grate, and the two children on the floor beside her. The elder, the little invalid, was simply staring at his mother in a wretched silence; but the younger, the baby of three, was restlessly throwing himself hither and thither, now pulling at the woman's skirts, now crying lustily, now whining in a hungry voice, for "Máma! din-din! Máma! din-din!"

Mrs. Vincent neither moved nor spoke, even when Marcella came in. She sat with her hands hanging over her lap in a desolation incapable of words. She was dirty and unkempt; the room was covered with litter; the breakfast things were still on the table; and the children were evidently starving.

Marcella, seized with pity, and divining what had happened, tried to rouse and comfort her. But she got no answer. Then she asked for matches. Mrs. Vincent made a mechanical effort to find them, but

subsided helpless with a shake of the head. At last Marcella found them herself, lit a fire of some sticks she discovered in a cupboard, and put on the kettle. Then she cut a slice of bread and dripping for each of the children — the only eatables she could find — and after she had dressed Bertie's leg she began to wash up the tea things and tidy the room, not knowing very well what to be at, but hoping minute by minute to get Mrs. Vincent to speak to her.

In the midst of her labours, an elderly woman cautiously opened the door and beckoned to her.

Marcella went out into the passage.

"I'm her mother, miss! I 'eered you were 'ere, an' I follered yer. Oh! such a business as we 'ad, 'er 'usband an' me, a gettin' of 'er 'ome last night. There's a neighbour come to me, an' she says: 'Mrs. Lucas, there's your daughter a drinkin' in that public 'ouse, an' if I was you I'd go and fetch her out; for she's got a lot o' money, an' she's treatin' everybody all round.' An' Charlie — that's 'er 'usband — ee come along too, an' between us we got holt on her. An' iver sence we brought her 'ome last night, she set there in that cheer, an' niver a word to nobody! Not to me 't any rate, nor the chillen. I believe 'er 'usband an' 'er 'ad words this mornin'. But she won't tell me nothin'. She sits there — just heart-broke" — the woman put up her apron to her eyes and began crying. "She ain't eatin' nothink all day, an' I dursen't leave the 'ouse out o' me sight — I lives close by, miss — for fear of 'er doing 'erself a mischief."

"How long has she been like this?" said Marcella, drawing the door cautiously to behind her.

"About fourteen month," said the woman, hopelessly. "An' none of us knows why. She was such a neat, pretty girl when she married 'im — an' ee such a steady fellow. An' I've done *my* best. I've talked to 'er, an' I've 'id 'er 'at an' her walking things, an' taken 'er money out of 'er pockets. An', bless yer, she's been all right now for seven weeks — till last night. Oh, deary, deary, me! whatever 'ull become o' them — 'er, an' 'im, an' the children!"

The tears coursed down the mother's wrinkled face.

"Leave her to me a little longer," said Marcella, softly; "but come back to me in about half an hour, and don't let her be alone."

The woman nodded, and went away.

Mrs. Vincent turned quickly round as Marcella came back again, and spoke for the first time:

"That was my mother you were talkin' to?"

"Yes," said Marcella, quietly, as she took the kettle off the fire. "Now I do want you to have a cup of tea, Mrs. Vincent. Will you, if I make it?"

The poor creature did not speak, but she followed Marcella's movements with her weary eyes. At last when Marcella knelt down beside her holding out a cup of tea and some bread and butter, she gave a sudden cry. Marcella hastily put down what she carried, lest it should be knocked out of her hand.

"He struck me this morning! — Charlie did — the first time in seven years. Look here!"

She pulled up her sleeve, and on her white, delicate arm she showed a large bruise. As she pointed to it her eyes filled with miserable tears; her lips quivered; anguish breathed in every feature. Yet even

in this abasement Marcella was struck once more with her slim prettiness, her refined air. This woman drinking and treating in a low public-house at midnight! — rescued thence by a decent husband!

She soothed her as best she could, but when she had succeeded in making the wretched soul take food, and so in putting some physical life into her, she found herself the recipient of an outburst of agony before which she quailed. The woman clung to her, moaning about her husband, about the demon instinct that had got hold of her, she hardly knew how — by means it seemed originally of a few weeks of low health and small self-indulgences — and she felt herself powerless to fight; about the wreck she had brought upon her home, the shame upon her husband, who was the respected, well-paid foreman of one of the large shops of the neighbourhood. All through it came back to him.

"We had words, Nurse, this morning, when he went out to his work. He said he'd nearly died of shame last night; that he couldn't bear it no more; that he'd take the children from me. And I was all queer in the head still, and I sauced him — and then — he looked like a devil — and he took me by the arm — and *threw* me down — as if I'd been a sack. An' he never, *never* — touched me — before — in all his life. An' he's never come in all day. An' perhaps I shan't ever see him again. An' last time — but it wasn't so bad as this — he said he'd try an' love me again if I'd behave. An' he did try — and I tried too. But now it's no good, an' perhaps he'll not come back. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do!" she flung her

arms above her head. "Won't *anybody* find him? won't *anybody* help me?"

She dropped a hand upon Marcella's arm, clutching it, her wild eyes seeking her companion's.

But at the same moment, with the very extremity of her own emotion, a cloud of impotence fell upon Marcella. She suddenly felt that she could do nothing — that there was nothing in her adequate to such an appeal — nothing strong enough to lift the weight of a human life thus flung upon her.

She was struck with a dryness, a numbness, that appalled her. She tried still to soothe and comfort, but nothing that she said went home — took hold. Between the feeling in her heart which might have reached and touched this despair, and the woman before her, there seemed to be a barrier she could not break. Or was it that she was really barren and poor in soul, and had never realised it before? A strange misery rose in her too, as she still knelt, tending and consoling, but with no efficacy — no power.

At last Mrs. Vincent sank into miserable quiet again. The mother came in, and silently began to put the children to bed. Marcella pressed the wife's cold hand, and went out hanging her head. She had just reached the door when it opened, and a man entered. A thrill passed through her at the sight of his honest, haggard face, and this time she found what to say.

"I have been sitting by your wife, Mr. Vincent. She is very ill and miserable, and very penitent. You will be kind to her?"

The husband looked at her, and then turned away.

"God help us!" he said; and Marcella went with-

out another word, and with that same wild, unaccustomed impulse of prayer filling her being which had first stirred in her at Mellor at the awful moment of Hurd's death.

She was very silent and distracted at tea, and afterwards — saying that she must write some letters and reports — she shut herself up, and bade good-night to Minta and the children.

But she did not write or read. She hung at the window a long time, watching the stars come out, as the summer light died from the sky, and even the walls and roofs and chimneys of this interminable London spread out before her took a certain dim beauty. And then, slipping down on the floor, with her head against a chair — an attitude of her stormy childhood — she wept with an abandonment and a passion she had not known for years. She thought of Mrs. Jervis — the saint — so near to death, so satisfied with "grace," so steeped in the heavenly life; then of the poor sinner she had just left and of the agony she had no power to stay. Both experiences had this in common — that each had had some part in plunging her deeper into this darkness of self-contempt.

What had come to her? During the past weeks there had been something wrestling in her — some new birth — some "conviction of sin," as Mrs. Jervis would have said. As she looked back over all her strenuous youth she hated it. What was wrong with her? Her own word to Anthony Craven returned upon her, mocked her — made now a scourge for her own pride, not a mere measure of blame for others.

Aldous Raeburn, her father and mother, her poor — one and all rose against her — plucked at her — reproached her. "Aye! what, indeed, are wealth and poverty?" cried a voice, which was the voice of them all; "what are opinions — what is influence, beauty, cleverness? — what is anything worth but *character* — but *soul?*"

And character — soul — can only be got by self-surrender; and self-surrender comes not of knowledge but of love.

A number of thoughts and phrases, hitherto of little meaning to her, floated into her mind — sank and pressed there. That strange word "grace" for instance!

A year ago it would not have smitten or troubled her. After her first inevitable reaction against the evangelical training of her school years, the rebellious cleverness of youth had easily decided that religion was played out, that Socialism and Science were enough for mankind.

But nobody could live in hospital — nobody could go among the poor — nobody could share the thoughts and hopes of people like Edward Hallin and his sister, without understanding that it is still here in the world — this "grace" that "sustaineth" — however variously interpreted, still living and working, as it worked of old, among the little Galilean towns, in Jerusalem, in Corinth. To Edward Hallin it did not mean the same, perhaps, as it meant to the hard-worked clergymen she knew, or to Mrs. Jervis. But to all it meant the motive power of life — something subduing, transforming, delivering — something that to-night she envied with a passion and a yearning that amazed herself.

How many things she craved, as an eager child craves them! First some moral change, she knew not what — then Aldous Raeburn's pardon and friendship — then and above all, the power to lose herself — the power to *love.*

Dangerous significant moment in a woman's life — moment at once of despair and of illusion!

CHAPTER VIII.

WHARTON was sitting in a secluded corner of the library of the House of Commons. He had a number of loose sheets of paper on a chair beside him, and others in his hand and on his knee. It was Friday afternoon; questions were going on in the House; and he was running rapidly for the last time through the notes of his speech, pencilling here and there, and every now and then taking up a volume of Hansard that lay near that he might verify a quotation.

An old county member, with a rugged face and eye-glasses, who had been in Parliament for a generation, came to the same corner to look up a speech. He glanced curiously at Wharton, with whom he had a familiar House-of-Commons acquaintance.

"Nervous, eh?" he said, as he put on his eye-glasses to inspect first Wharton, then the dates on the backs of the Reports.

Wharton put his papers finally together, and gave a long stretch.

"Not particularly."

"Well, it's a beastly audience!" said the other, carrying off his book.

Wharton, lost apparently in contemplation of the ceiling, fell into a dreamy attitude. But his eye saw nothing of the ceiling, and was not at all dreamy.

He was not thinking of his speech, nor of the other man's remark. He was thinking of Marcella Boyce.

When he left her the other day he had been conscious, only more vividly and intensely, more possessively as it were, than she, of the same general impression that had been left upon her. A new opening for pleasure — their meeting presented itself to him, too, in the same way. What had he been about all this time? *Forget?* — such a creature? Why, it was the merest wantonness! As if such women — with such a brow, such vitality, such a gait — passed in every street!

What possessed him now was an imperious eagerness to push the matter, to recover the old intimacy — and as to what might come out of it, let the gods decide! He could have had but a very raw appreciation of her at Mellor. It seemed to him that she had never forced him to think of her then in absence, as he had thought of her since the last meeting.

As for the nursing business, and the settlement in Brown's Buildings, it was, of course, mere play-acting. No doubt when she emerged she would be all the more of a personage for having done it. But she must emerge soon. To rule and shine was as much her *métier* as it was the *métier* of a bricklayer's labourer to carry hods. By George! what would not Lady Selina give for beauty of such degree and kind as that! They must be brought together. He already foresaw that the man who should launch Marcella Boyce in London would play a stroke for himself as well as for her. And she must be launched in London. Let other people nurse, and pitch their tents in

little workmen's flats, and *live* democracy instead of preaching it. Her fate was fixed for her by her physique. *Il ne faut pas sortir de son caractère.*

The sight of Bennett approaching distracted him.

Bennett's good face showed obvious vexation.

"He sticks to it," he said, as Wharton jumped up to meet him. "Talks of his conscience — and a lot of windy stuff. He seems to have arranged it with the Whips. I dare say he won't do much harm."

"Except to himself," said Wharton, with dry bitterness. "Goodness! let's leave him alone!"

He and Bennett lingered a few minutes discussing points of tactics. Wilkins had, of course, once more declared himself the *enfant terrible* of a party which, though still undefined, was drawing nearer day by day to organised existence and separate leadership. The effect of to-night's debate might be of far-reaching importance. Wharton's Resolution, pledging the House to a Legal Eight Hours' Day for all trades, came at the end of a long and varied agitation, was at the moment in clear practical relation to labour movements all over the country, and had in fact gained greatly in significance and interest since it was first heard of in public, owing to events of current history. Workable proposals — a moderate tone — and the appearance, at any rate, of harmony and a united front among the representatives of labour — if so much at least could be attained to-night, both Wharton and Bennett believed that not only the cause itself, but the importance of the Labour party in the House would be found to have gained enormously.

"I hope I shall get my turn before dinner," said

Bennett, as he was going; "I want badly to get off for an hour or so. The division won't be till half-past ten at earliest."

Wharton stood for a moment in a brown study, with his hands in his pockets, after Bennett left him. It was by no means wholly clear to him what line Bennett would take — with regard to one or two points. After a long acquaintance with the little man, Wharton was not always, nor indeed generally, at his ease with him. Bennett had curious reserves. As to his hour off, Wharton felt tolerably certain that he meant to go and hear a famous Revivalist preacher hold forth at a public hall not far from the House. The streets were full of placards.

Well!—to every man his own excitements! What time? He looked first at his watch, then at the marked question paper Bennett had left behind him. The next minute he was hurrying along passages and stairs, with his springing, boyish step, to the Ladies' Gallery.

The magnificent doorkeeper saluted him with particular deference. Wharton was in general a favourite with officials.

"The two ladies are come, sir. You'll find them in the front — oh! not very full yet, sir — will be directly."

Wharton drew aside the curtain of the Gallery, and looked in. Yes!—there was the dark head bent forward, pressed indeed against the grating which closes the front of the den into which the House of Commons puts its ladies — as though its owner were already absorbed in what was passing before her.

She looked up with an eager start, as she heard his voice in her ear.

"Oh! now, come and tell us everything — and who everybody is. Why don't we see the Speaker? — and which is the Government side? — oh, yes, I see. And who's this speaking now?"

"Why, I thought you knew everything," said Wharton as, with a greeting to Miss Craven, he slipped in beside them and took a still vacant chair for an instant. "How shall I instruct a Speaker's great-niece?"

"Why, of course I feel as if the place belonged to me!" said Marcella, impatiently; "but that somehow doesn't seem to help me to people's names. Where's Mr. Gladstone? Oh, I see. Look, look, Edith! — he's just come in! — oh, don't be so superior, though you *have* been here before — you couldn't tell me heaps of people!"

Her voice had a note of joyous excitement like a child's.

"That's because I'm short-sighted," said Edith Craven, calmly; "but it's no reason why you should show me Mr. Gladstone."

"Oh, my dear, my dear! — do be quiet! Now, Mr. Wharton, where are the Irishmen? Oh! I wish we could have an Irish row! And where do you sit? — I see — and there's Mr. Bennett — and that black-faced man, Mr. Wilkins, I met at the Hallins — you don't like him, do you?" she said, drawing back and looking at him sharply.

"Who? Wilkins? Perhaps you'd better ask me that question later on!" said Wharton, with a twist of

the lip; "he's going to do his best to make a fool of himself and us to-night — we shall see! It's kind of you to wish us an Irish row! — considering that if I miss my chance to-night I shall never get another!"

"Then for heaven's sake don't let's wish it!" she said decidedly. "Oh, that's the Irish Secretary answering now, is it?" — a pause — "Dear me, how civil everybody is. I don't think this is a good place for a Democrat, Mr. Wharton — I find myself terribly in love with the Government. But who's that?"

She craned her neck. Wharton was silent. The next instant she drew hurriedly back.

"I didn't see," she murmured; "it's so confusing."

A tall man had risen from the end of the Government bench, and was giving an answer connected with the Home Secretary's department. For the first time since their parting in the Mellor drawing-room Marcella saw Aldous Raeburn.

She fell very silent, and leant back in her chair. Yet Wharton's quick glance perceived that she both looked and listened intently, so long as the somewhat high-pitched voice was speaking.

"He does those things very well," he said carelessly, judging it best to take the bull by the horns. "Never a word too much — they don't get any change out of him. Do you see that old fellow in the white beard under the gallery? He is one of the chartered bores. When he gets up to-night the House will dine. I shall come up and look for you, and hand you over to a friend if I may — a Staffordshire member, who has his wife here — Mrs. Lane. I have engaged a table, and I can start with you. Unfortunately I

mustn't be long out of the House, as it's my motion; but they will look after you."

The girls glanced a little shyly at each other. Nothing had been said about dining; but Wharton took it for granted; and they yielded. It was Marcella's "day off," and she was a free woman.

"Good-bye, then," he said, getting up. "I shall be on in about twenty minutes. Wish me well through!"

Marcella looked round and smiled. But her vivacity had been quenched for the moment; and Wharton departed not quite so well heartened for the fray as he could have wished to be. It was hard luck that the Raeburn ghost should walk this particular evening.

Marcella bent forward again when he had gone, and remained for long silent, looking down into the rapidly filling House. Aldous Raeburn was lying back on the Treasury bench, his face upturned. She knew very well that it was impossible he should see her; yet every now and then she shrank a little away as though he must. The face looked to her older and singularly blanched; but she supposed that must be the effect of the light; for she noticed the same pallor in many others.

"*All that my life can do to pour good measure — pressed down — running over — into yours, I vowed you then!*"

The words stole into her memory, throbbing there like points of pain. Was it indeed this man under her eyes — so listless, so unconscious — who had said them to her with a passion of devotion it shamed her to think of.

And now — never so much as an ordinary word of

friendship between them again? "On the broad seas of life enisled" — separate, estranged, for ever? It was like the touch of death — the experience brought with it such a chill — such a sense of irreparable fact, of limitations never to be broken through.

Then she braced herself. The "things that are behind" must be left. To have married him after all would have been the greatest wrong. Nor, in one sense, was what she had done irreparable. She chose to believe Frank Leven, rather than Edward Hallin. Of course he must and should marry! It was absurd to suppose that he should not. No one had a stronger sense of family than he. And as for the girl — the little dancing, flirting girl! — why the thing happened every day. *His* wife should not be too strenuous, taken up with problems and questions of her own. She should cheer, amuse, distract him. Marcella endeavoured to think of it all with the dry common-sense her mother would have applied to it. One thing at least was clear to her — the curious recognition that never before had she considered Aldous Raeburn, *in and for himself*, as an independent human being.

"He was just a piece of furniture in my play last year," she said to herself with a pang of frank remorse. "He was well quit of me!"

But she was beginning to recover her spirits, and when at last Raeburn, after a few words with a minister who had just arrived, disappeared suddenly behind the Speaker's chair, the spectacle below her seized her with the same fascination as before.

The House was filling rapidly. Questions were

nearly over, and the speech of the evening, on which considerable public expectation both inside and outside Parliament had been for some time concentrated, was fast approaching. Peers were straggling into the gallery; the reporters were changing just below her: and some "crack hands" among them, who had been lounging till now, were beginning to pay attention and put their paper in order. The Irish benches, the Opposition, the Government — all were full, and there was a large group of members round the door.

"There he is!" cried Marcella, involuntarily, with a pulse of excitement, as Wharton's light young figure made its way through the crowd. He sat down on a corner seat below the gangway and put on his hat.

In five minutes more he was on his feet, speaking to an attentive and crowded House in a voice — clear, a little hard, but capable of the most accomplished and subtle variety — which for the first moment sent a shudder of memory through Marcella.

Then she found herself listening with as much trepidation and anxiety as though some personal interest and reputation depended for her, too, on the success of the speech. Her mind was first invaded by a strong, an *irritable* sense of the difficulty of the audience. How was it possible for any one, unless he had been trained to it for years, to make any effect upon such a crowd! — so irresponsive, individualist, unfused — so lacking, as it seemed to the raw spectator, in the qualities and excitements that properly belong to multitude! Half the men down below, under their hats, seemed to her asleep; the rest indifferent. And were those languid, indistinguishable murmurs what the newspapers call "*cheers*"?

But the voice below flowed on; point after point came briskly out; the atmosphere warmed; and presently this first impression passed into one wholly different — nay, at the opposite pole. Gradually the girl's ardent sense — informed, perhaps, more richly than most women's with the memories of history and literature, for in her impatient way she had been at all times a quick, omnivorous reader — awoke to the peculiar conditions, the special thrill, attaching to the place and its performers. The philosopher derides it; the man of letters out of the House talks of it with a smile as a "Ship of Fools"; both, when occasion offers, passionately desire a seat in it; each would give his right hand to succeed in it.

Why? Because here after all is power — here is the central machine. Here are the men who, both by their qualities and their defects, are to have for their span of life the leading — or the wrecking? — of this great fate-bearing force, this "weary Titan" we call our country. Here things are not only debated, but done — lamely or badly, perhaps, but still *done* — which will affect our children's children; which link us to the Past; which carry us on safely or dangerously to a Future only the gods know. And in this passage, this chequered, doubtful passage from thinking to doing, an infinite savour and passion of life is somehow disengaged. It penetrates through the boredom, through all the failure, public and personal; it enwraps the spectacle and the actors; it carries and supports patriot and adventurer alike.

Ideas, perceptions of this kind — the first chill over — stole upon and conquered Marcella. Presently it

was as though she had passed into Wharton's place, was seeing with his eyes, feeling with his nerves. It would be a success this speech — it was a success! The House was gained, was attentive. A case long familiar to it in portions and fragments, which had been spoilt by violence and discredited by ignorance, was being presented to it with all the resources of a great talent — with brilliancy, moderation, practical detail — moderation above all! From the slight historical sketch, with which the speech opened, of the English "working day," the causes and the results of the Factory Acts — through the general description of the present situation, of the workman's present hours, opportunities and demands, the growth of the desire for State control, the machinery by which it was to be enforced, and the effects it might be expected to have on the workman himself, on the great army of the "unemployed," on wages, on production, and on the economic future of England — the speaker carried his thread of luminous speech, without ever losing his audience for an instant. At every point he addressed himself to the smoothing of difficulties, to the propitiation of fears; and when, after the long and masterly handling of detail, he came to his peroration, to the bantering of capitalist terrors, to the vindication of the workman's claim to fix the conditions of his labour, and to the vision lightly and simply touched of the regenerate working home of the future, inhabited by free men, dedicated to something beyond the first brutal necessities of the bodily life, possessed indeed of its proper share of the human inheritance of leisure, knowledge, and delight — the crowded benches before and behind

him grudged him none of it. The House of Commons is not tolerant of "flights," except from its chartered masters. But this young man had earned his flight; and they heard him patiently. For the rest, the Government had been most attractively wooed; and the Liberal party in the midst of much plain speaking had been treated on the whole with a deference and a forbearance that had long been conspicuously lacking in the utterances of the Labour men.

"'The mildest mannered man' *et cetera!*" said a smiling member of the late Government to a companion on the front Opposition bench, as Wharton sat down amid the general stir and movement which betoken the break-up of a crowded House, and the end of a successful speech which people are eager to discuss in the lobbies. "A fine performance, eh? Great advance on anything last year."

"Bears about as much relation to facts as I do to the angels!" growled the man addressed.

"What! as bad as that?" said the other, laughing. "Look! they have put up old Denny. I think I shall stay and hear him." And he laid down his hat again which he had taken up.

Meanwhile Marcella in the Ladies' Gallery had thrown herself back in her chair with a long breath.

"How can one listen to anything else!" she said; and for a long time she sat staring at the House without hearing a word of what the very competent, caustic, and well-informed manufacturer on the Government side was saying. Every dramatic and æsthetic instinct she possessed — and she was full of them — had been stirred and satisfied by the speech and the speaker.

But more than that. He had spoken for the toiler and the poor; his peroration above all had contained tones and accents which were in fact the products of something perfectly sincere in the speaker's motley personality; and this girl, who in her wild way had given herself to the poor, had followed him with all her passionate heart. Yet, at the same time, with an amount of intellectual dissent every now and then as to measures and methods, a scepticism of detail which astonished herself! A year before she had been as a babe beside him, whether in matters of pure mind or of worldly experience. Now she was for the first time conscious of a curious growth — independence.

But the intellectual revolt, such as it was, was lost again, as soon as it arose, in the general impression which the speech had left upon her — in this warm quickening of the pulses, this romantic interest in the figure, the scene, the young emerging personality.

Edith Craven looked at her with wondering amusement. She and her brothers were typical Venturists — a little cynical, therefore, towards all the world, friend or foe. A Venturist is a Socialist minus cant, and a cause which cannot exist at all without a passion of sentiment lays it down — through him — as a first law, that sentiment in public is the abominable thing. Edith Craven thought that after all Marcella was little less raw and simple now than she had been in the old days.

"There!" said Marcella, with relief, "that's done. Now, who's this? That man *Wilkins!*"

Her tone showed her disgust. Wilkins had sprung up the instant Wharton's Conservative opponent had

given the first decisive sign of sitting down. Another man on the same side was also up, but Wilkins, black and frowning, held his own stubbornly, and his rival subsided.

With the first sentences of the new speech the House knew that it was to have an emotion, and men came trooping in again. And certainly the short stormy utterance was dramatic enough. Dissent on the part of an important north-country Union from some of the most vital machinery of the bill which had been sketched by Wharton — personal jealousy and distrust of the mover of the resolution — denial of his representative place, and sneers at his kid-gloved attempts to help a class with which he had nothing to do — the most violent protest against the servility with which he had truckled to the now effete party of free contract and political enfranchisement — and the most passionate assertion that between any Labour party, worthy of the name, and either of the great parties of the past there lay and must lie a gulf of hatred, unfathomable and unquenchable, till Labour had got its rights, and landlord, employer, and dividend-hunter were trampled beneath its heel — all these ugly or lurid things emerged with surprising clearness from the torrent of north-country speech. For twenty minutes Nehemiah Wilkins rioted in one of the best "times" of his life. That he was an orator thousands of working men had borne him witness again and again; and in his own opinion he had never spoken better.

The House at first enjoyed its sensation. Then, as the hard words rattled on, it passed easily into the

stage of amusement. Lady Cradock's burly husband bent forward from the front Opposition bench, caught Wharton's eye, and smiled, as though to say: "What! —you haven't even been able to keep up appearances so far!" And Wilkins's final attack upon the Liberals —who, after ruining their own chances and the chances of the country, were now come cap in hand to the working man whining for his support as their only hope of recovery — was delivered to a mocking chorus of laughter and cheers, in the midst of which, with an angry shake of his great shoulders, he flung himself down on his seat.

Meanwhile Wharton, who had spent the first part of Wilkins's speech in a state of restless fidget, his hat over his eyes, was alternately sitting erect with radiant looks, or talking rapidly to Bennett, who had come to sit beside him. The Home Secretary got up after Wilkins had sat down, and spent a genial forty minutes in delivering the Government *non possumus*, couched, of course, in the tone of deference to King Labour which the modern statesman learns at his mother's knee, but enlivened with a good deal of ironical and effective perplexity as to which hand to shake and whose voice to follow, and winding up with a tribute of compliment to Wharton, mixed with some neat mock condolence with the Opposition under the ferocities of some others of its nominal friends.

Altogether, the finished performance of the old stager, the *habitué*. While it was going on, Marcella noticed that Aldous Raeburn had come back again to his seat next to the Speaker, who was his official chief. Every now and then the Minister turned to him, and

Raeburn handed him a volume of Hansard or the copy of some Parliamentary Return whence the great man was to quote. Marcella watched every movement; then from the Government bench her eye sped across the House to Wharton sitting once more buried in his hat, his arms folded in front of him. A little shiver of excitement ran through her. The two men upon whom her life had so far turned were once more in presence of, pitted against, each other — and she, once more, looking on!

When the Home Secretary sat down, the House was growing restive with thoughts of dinner, and a general movement had begun — when it was seen that Bennett was up. Again men who had gone out came back, and those who were still there resigned themselves. Bennett was a force in the House, a man always listened to and universally respected, and the curiosity felt as to the relations between him and this new star and would-be leader had been for some time considerable.

When Bennett sat down, the importance of the member for West Brookshire, both in the House and in the country, had risen a hundred per cent. A man who over a great part of the north was in labour concerns the unquestioned master of many legions, and whose political position had hitherto been one of conspicuous moderation, even to his own hurt, had given Wharton the warmest possible backing; had endorsed his proposals, to their most contentious and doubtful details, and in a few generous though still perhaps ambiguous words had let the House see what he personally thought of the services rendered to labour as

a whole during the past five years, and to the weak and scattered group of Labour members in particular, since his entrance into Parliament, by the young and brilliant man beside him.

Bennett was no orator. He was a plain man, ennobled by the training of religious dissent, at the same time indifferently served often by an imperfect education. But the very simplicity and homeliness of its expression gave additional weight to this first avowal of a strong conviction that the time had come when the Labour party *must* have separateness and a leader if it were to rise out of insignificance; to this frank renunciation of whatever personal claims his own past might have given him; and to the promise of unqualified support to the policy of the younger man, in both its energetic and conciliatory aspects. He threw out a little not unkindly indignation, if one may be allowed the phrase, in the direction of Wilkins — who in the middle of the speech abruptly walked out — and before he sat down, the close attention, the looks, the cheers, the evident excitement of the men sitting about him, — amongst whom were two-thirds of the whole Labour representation in Parliament — made it clear to the House that the speech marked an epoch not only in the career of Harry Wharton, but in the parliamentary history of the great industrial movement.

The white-bearded bore under the gallery, whom Wharton had pointed out to Marcella, got up as Bennett subsided. The house streamed out like one man. Bennett, exhausted by the heat and the effort, mopped his brow with his red handkerchief, and, in the tension of fatigue, started as he felt a touch upon his arm.

Wharton was bending over to him — perfectly white, with a lip he in vain tried to steady.

"I can't thank you," he said; "I should make a fool of myself."

Bennett nodded pleasantly, and presently both were pressing into the out-going crowd, avoiding each other with the ineradicable instinct of the Englishman.

Wharton did not recover his self-control completely till, after an ordeal of talk and handshaking in the lobby, he was on his way to the Ladies' Gallery. Then in a flash he found himself filled with the spirits, the exhilaration, of a schoolboy. This wonderful experience behind him! — and upstairs, waiting for him, those eyes, that face! How could he get her to himself somehow for a moment — and dispose of that Craven girl?

"Well!" he said to her joyously, as she turned round in the darkness of the Gallery.

But she was seized with sudden shyness, and he felt, rather than saw, the glow of pleasure and excitement which possessed her.

"Don't let's talk here," she said. "Can't we go out? I am melted!"

"Yes, of course! Come on to the terrace. It's a divine evening, and we shall find our party there. Well, Miss Craven, were you interested?"

Edith smiled demurely.

"I thought it a good debate," she said.

"Confound these Venturist prigs!" was Wharton's inward remark as he led the way.

CHAPTER IX.

"How enchanting!" cried Marcella, as they emerged on the terrace, and river, shore, and sky opened upon them in all the thousand-tinted light and shade of a still and perfect evening. "Oh, how hot we were — and how badly you treat us in those dens!"

Those confident eyes of Wharton's shone as they glanced at her.

She wore a pretty white dress of some cotton stuff — it seemed to him he remembered it of old — and on the waving masses of hair lay a little bunch of black lace that called itself a bonnet, with black strings tied demurely under the chin. The abundance of character and dignity in the beauty which yet to-night was so young and glowing — the rich arresting note of the voice — the inimitable carriage of the head — Wharton realised them all at the moment with peculiar vividness, because he felt them in some sort as additions to his own personal wealth. To-night she was in his power, his possession.

The terrace was full of people, and alive with a Babel of talk. Yet, as he carried his companions forward in search of Mrs. Lane, he saw that Marcella was instantly marked. Every one who passed them, or made way for them, looked and looked again.

The girl, absorbed in her pleasant or agitating impressions, knew nothing of her own effect. She

was drinking in the sunset light — the poetic mystery of the river — the lovely line of the bridge — the associations of the place where she stood, of this great building overshadowing her. Every now and then she started in a kind of terror lest some figure in the dusk should be Aldous Raeburn; then when a stranger showed himself she gave herself up again to her young pleasure in the crowd and the spectacle. But Wharton knew that she was observed; Wharton caught the whisper that followed her. His vanity, already so well-fed this evening, took the attention given to her as so much fresh homage to itself; and she had more and more glamour for him in the reflected light of this publicity, this common judgment.

"Ah, here are the Lanes!" he said, detecting at last a short lady in black amid a group of men.

Marcella and Edith were introduced. Then Edith found a friend in a young London member who was to be one of the party, and strolled off with him till dinner should be announced.

"I will just take Miss Boyce to the end of the terrace," said Wharton to Mr. Lane; "we shan't get anything to eat yet awhile. What a crowd! The Alresfords not come yet, I see."

Lane shrugged his shoulders as he looked round.

"Raeburn has a party to-night. And there are at least three or four others besides ourselves. I should think food and service will be equally scarce!"

Wharton glanced quickly at Marcella. But she was talking to Mrs. Lane, and had heard nothing.

"Let me just show you the terrace," he said to her. "No chance of dinner for another twenty minutes."

They strolled away together. As they moved along, a number of men waylaid the speaker of the night with talk and congratulations — glancing the while at the lady on his left. But presently they were away from the crowd which hung about the main entrance to the terrace, and had reached the comparatively quiet western end, where were only a few pairs and groups walking up and down.

"Shall I see Mr. Bennett?" she asked him eagerly, as they paused by the parapet, looking down upon the grey-brown water swishing under the fast incoming tide. "I want to."

"I asked him to dine, but he wouldn't. He has gone to a prayer-meeting — at least I guess so. There is a famous American evangelist speaking in Westminster to-night — I am as certain as I ever am of anything that Bennett is there — dining on Moody and Sankey. Men are a medley, don't you think? — So you liked his speech?"

"How coolly you ask!" she said, laughing. "Did *you?*"

He was silent a moment, his smiling gaze fixed on the water. Then he turned to her.

"How much gratitude do you think I owe him?"

"As much as you can pay," she said with emphasis. "I never heard anything more complete, more generous."

"So you were carried away?"

She looked at him with a curious, sudden gravity — a touch of defiance.

"No! — neither by him, nor by you. I don't believe in your Bill — and I am *sure* you will never carry it!"

Wharton lifted his eyebrows.

"Perhaps you'll tell me where you are," he said, "that I may know how to talk? When we last discussed these things at Mellor, I *think* — you were a Socialist?"

"What does it matter what I was last year?" she asked him gaily, yet with a final inflection of the voice which was not gay; "I was a baby! *Now* perhaps I have earned a few poor, little opinions — but they are a ragged bundle — and I have never any time to sort them."

"Have you left the Venturists?"

"No! — but I am full of perplexities; and the Cravens, I see, will soon be for turning me out. You understand — I *know* some working folk now!"

"So you did last year."

"No!" — she insisted, shaking her head — "that was all different. But now I am *in* their world — I live with them — and they talk to me. One evening in the week I am 'at home' for all the people I know in our Buildings — men and women. Mrs. Hurd — you know who I mean?" — her brow contracted a moment — "she comes with her sewing to keep me company; so does Edith Craven; and sometimes the little room is packed. The men smoke — when we can have the windows open! — and I believe I shall soon smoke too — it makes them talk better. We get all sorts — Socialists, Conservatives, Radicals —"

" — And you don't think much of the Socialists?"

"Well! they are the interesting, dreamy fellows," she said, laughing, "who don't save, and muddle their lives. And as for argument, the Socialist workman

doesn't care twopence for facts — that don't suit him. It's superb the way he treats them!"

"I should like to know who does care!" said Wharton, with a shrug. Then he turned with his back to the parapet, the better to command her. He had taken off his hat for coolness, and the wind played with the crisp curls of hair. "But tell me" — he went on — "who has been tampering with you? Is it Hallin? You told me you saw him often."

"Perhaps. But what if it's everything? — *living?* — saving your presence! A year ago at any rate the world was all black — *or* white — to me. Now I lie awake at night, puzzling my head about the shades between — which makes the difference. A compulsory Eight Hours' Day for all men in all trades!" Her note of scorn startled him. "You *know* you won't get it! And all the other big exasperating things you talk about — public organisation of labour, and the rest — you won't get them till all the world is a New Jerusalem — and when the world is a New Jerusalem nobody will want them!"

Wharton made her an ironical bow.

"Nicely said! — though we have heard it before. Upon my word, you have marched! — or Edward Hallin has carried you. So now you think the poor are as well off as possible, in the best of all possible worlds — is that the result of your nursing? You agree with Denny, in fact? the man who got up after me?"

His tone annoyed her. Then suddenly the name suggested to her a recollection that brought a frown.

"That was the man, then, you attacked in the *Clarion* this morning!"

"Ah! you read me!" said Wharton, with sudden pleasure. "Yes — that opened the campaign. As you know, of course, Craven has gone down, and the strike begins next week. Soon we shall bring two batteries to bear, he letting fly as correspondent, and I from the office. I enjoyed writing that article."

"So I should think," she said drily; "all I know is, it made *one* reader passionately certain that there was another side to the matter! There may not be. I dare say there isn't; but on me at least that was the effect. Why is it" — she broke out with vehemence — "that not a single Labour paper is ever capable of the simplest justice to an opponent?"

"You think any other sort of paper is any better?" he asked her scornfully.

"I dare say not. But that doesn't matter to me! it is *we* who talk of justice, of respect, and sympathy from man to man, and then we go and blacken the men who don't agree with us — whole classes, that is to say, of our fellow-countrymen, not in the old honest slashing style, Tartuffes that we are! — but with all the delicate methods of a new art of slander, pursued almost for its own sake. We know so much better — always — than our opponents, we hardly condescend even to be angry. One is only 'sorry' — 'obliged to punish' — like the priggish governess of one's childhood!"

In spite of himself, Wharton flushed.

"My best thanks!" he said. "Anything more? I prefer to take my drubbing all at once."

She looked at him steadily.

"Why did you write, or allow that article on the West Brookshire landlords two days ago?"

Wharton started.

"Well! wasn't it true?"

"No!" she said with a curling lip; "and I think you know it wasn't true."

"What! as to the Raeburns? Upon my word, I should have imagined," he said slowly, "that it represented your views at one time with tolerable accuracy."

Her nerve suddenly deserted her. She bent over the parapet, and, taking up a tiny stone that lay near, she threw it unsteadily into the river. He saw the hand shake.

"Look here," he said, turning round so that he too leant over the river, his arms on the parapet, his voice close to her ear. "Are you always going to quarrel with me like this? Don't you know that there is no one in the world I would sooner please if I could?"

She did not speak.

"In the first place," he said, laughing, "as to my speech, do you suppose that I believe in that Bill which I described just now?"

"I don't know," she said indignantly, once more playing with the stones on the wall. "It sounded like it."

"That is my gift — my little *carillon*, as Renan would say. But do you imagine I want you or any one else to tell me that we shan't get such a Bill for generations? Of course we shan't!"

"Then why do you make farcical speeches, bam-

boozling your friends and misleading the House of Commons?"

He saw the old storm-signs with glee — the lightning in the eye, the rose on the cheek. She was never so beautiful as when she was angry.

"Because, my dear lady — *we must generate our force*. Steam must be got up — I am engaged in doing it. We shan't get a compulsory eight hours' day for all trades — but in the course of the agitation for that precious illusion, and by the help of a great deal of beating of tom-toms, and gathering of clans, we shall get a great many other things by the way that we *do* want. Hearten your friends, and frighten your enemies — there is no other way of scoring in politics — and the particular score doesn't matter. Now don't look at me as if you would like to impeach me! — or I shall turn the tables. *I* am still fighting for my illusions in my own way — *you*, it seems, have given up yours!"

But for once he had underrated her sense of humour. She broke into a low merry laugh which a little disconcerted him.

"You mock me?" he said quickly — "think me insincere, unscrupulous? — Well, I dare say! But you have no right to mock me. Last year, again and again, you promised me guerdon. Now it has come to paying — and I claim!"

His low distinct voice in her ear had a magnetising effect upon her. She slowly turned her face to him, overcome by — yet fighting against — memory. If she had seen in him the smallest sign of reference to that scene she hated to think of, he would have

probably lost this hold upon her on the spot. But his tact was perfect. She saw nothing but a look of dignity and friendship, which brought upon her with a rush all those tragic things they had shared and fought through, purifying things of pity and fear, which had so often seemed to her the atonement for, the washing away of that old baseness.

He saw her face tremble a little. Then she said proudly —

"I promised to be grateful. So I am."

"No, no!" he said, still in the same low tone. "You promised me a friend. Where is she?"

She made no answer. Her hands were hanging loosely over the water, and her eyes were fixed on the haze opposite, whence emerged the blocks of the great hospital and the twinkling points of innumerable lamps. But his gaze compelled her at last, and she turned back to him. He saw an expression half hostile, half moved, and pressed on before she could speak.

"Why do you bury yourself in that nursing life?" he said drily. "It is not the life for you; it does not fit you in the least."

"You test your friends!" she cried, her cheek flaming again at the provocative change of voice. "What possible right have you to that remark?"

"I know you, and I know the causes you want to serve. You can't serve them where you are. Nursing is not for you; you are wanted among your own class — among your equals — among the people who are changing and shaping England. It is absurd. You are masquerading."

She gave him a little sarcastic nod.

"Thank you. I am doing a little honest work for the first time in my life."

He laughed. It was impossible to tell whether he was serious or posing.

"You are just what you were in one respect — terribly in the right! Be a little humble to-night for a change. Come, condescend to the classes! Do you see Mr. Lane calling us?"

And, in fact, Mr. Lane, with his arm in the air, was eagerly beckoning to them from the distance.

"Do you know Lady Selina Farrell?" he asked her, as they walked quickly back to the dispersing crowd.

"No; who is she?"

Wharton laughed.

"Providence should contrive to let Lady Selina overhear that question once a week — in your tone! Well, she is a personage — Lord Alresford's daughter — unmarried, rich, has a *salon*, or thinks she has — manipulates a great many people's fortunes and lives, or thinks she does, which, after all, is what matters — to Lady Selina. She wants to know you, badly. Do you think you can be kind to her? There she is — you will let me introduce you? She dines with us."

In another moment Marcella had been introduced to a tall, fair lady in a very fashionable black and pink bonnet, who held out a gracious hand.

"I have heard so much of you!" said Lady Selina, as they walked along the passage to the dining-room together. "It must be so wonderful, your nursing!"

Marcella laughed rather restively.

"No, I don't think it is," she said; "there are so many of us."

"Oh, but the things you do — Mr. Wharton told me — *so* interesting!"

Marcella said nothing, and as to her looks the passage was dark. Lady Selina thought her a very handsome but very *gauche* young woman. Still, *gauche* or no, she had thrown over Aldous Raeburn and thirty thousand a year; an act which, as Lady Selina admitted, put you out of the common run.

"Do you know most of the people dining?" she enquired in her blandest voice. "But no doubt you do. You are a great friend of Mr. Wharton's, I think?"

"He stayed at our house last year," said Marcella, abruptly.. "No, I don't know anybody."

"Then shall I tell you? It makes it more interesting, doesn't it? It ought to be a pleasant little party."

And the great lady lightly ran over the names. It seemed to Marcella that most of them were very "smart" or very important. Some of the smart names were vaguely known to her from Miss Raeburn's talk of last year; and, besides, there were a couple of Tory Cabinet ministers and two or three prominent members. It was all rather surprising.

At dinner she found herself between one of the Cabinet ministers and the young and good-looking private secretary of the other. Both men were agreeable, and very willing, besides, to take trouble with this unknown beauty. The minister, who knew the

Raeburns very well, was discussing with himself all the time whether this was indeed the Miss Boyce of that story. His suspicion and curiosity were at any rate sufficiently strong to make him give himself much pains to draw her out.

Her own conversation, however, was much distracted by the attention she could not help giving to her host and his surroundings. Wharton had Lady Selina on his right, and the young and distinguished wife of Marcella's minister on his left. At the other end of the table sat Mrs. Lane, doing her duty spasmodically to Lord Alresford, who still, in a blind old age, gave himself all the airs of the current statesman and possible premier. But the talk, on the whole, was general — a gay and careless give-and-take of parliamentary, social, and racing gossip, the ball flying from one accustomed hand to another.

And Marcella could not get over the astonishment of Wharton's part in it. She shut her eyes sometimes for an instant and tried to see him as her girl's fancy had seen him at Mellor — the solitary, eccentric figure pursued by the hatreds of a renounced Patricianate — bringing the enmity of his own order as a pledge and offering to the Plebs he asked to lead. Where even was the speaker of an hour ago? Chat of Ascot and of Newmarket; discussion with Lady Selina or with his left-hand neighbour of country-house "sets," with a patter of names which sounded in her scornful ear like a paragraph from the *World;* above all, a general air of easy comradeship, which no one at this table, at any rate, seemed inclined to dispute, with every exclusiveness and every amusement of the "idle rich,"

whereof — in the popular idea — he was held to be one of the very particular foes! —

No doubt, as the dinner moved on, this first impression changed somewhat. She began to distinguish notes that had at first been lost upon her. She caught the mocking, ambiguous tone under which she herself had so often fumed; she watched the occasional recoil of the women about him, as though they had been playing with some soft-pawed animal, and had been suddenly startled by the gleam of its claws. These things puzzled, partly propitiated her. But on the whole she was restless and hostile. How was it possible — from such personal temporising — such a frittering of the forces and sympathies — to win the single-mindedness and the power without which no great career is built? She wanted to talk with him — reproach him!

"Well — I must go — worse luck," said Wharton at last, laying down his napkin and rising. "Lane, will you take charge? I will join you outside later."

"If he ever finds us!" said her neighbour to Marcella. "I never saw the place so crowded. It is odd how people enjoy these scrambling meals in these very ugly rooms."

Marcella, smiling, looked down with him over the bare coffee-tavern place, in which their party occupied a sort of high table across the end, while two other small gatherings were accommodated in the space below.

"Are there any other rooms than this?" she asked idly.

"One more," said a young man across the table, who

had been introduced to her in the dusk outside, and had not yet succeeded in getting her to look at him, as he desired. "But there is another big party there to-night — Raeburn — you know," he went on innocently, addressing the minister; "he has got the Winterbournes and the Macdonalds — quite a gathering — rather an unusual thing for him."

The minister glanced quickly at his companion. But she had turned to answer a question from Lady Selina, and thenceforward, till the party rose, she gave him little opportunity of observing her.

As the outward-moving stream of guests was once more in the corridor leading to the terrace, Marcella hurriedly made her way to Mrs. Lane.

"I think," she said — "I am afraid — we ought to be going — my friend and I. Perhaps Mr. Lane — perhaps he would just show us the way out; we can easily find a cab."

There was an imploring, urgent look in her face which struck Mrs. Lane. But Mr. Lane's loud friendly voice broke in from behind.

"My dear Miss Boyce! — we can't possibly allow it — no! no — just half an hour — while they bring us our coffee — to do your homage, you know, to the terrace — and the river — and the moon! — And then — if you don't want to go back to the House for the division, we will see you safely into your cab. Look at the moon! — and the tide" — they had come to the wide door opening on the terrace — "aren't they doing their very best for you?"

Marcella looked behind her in despair. *Where* was Edith? Far in the rear! — and fully occupied

apparently with two or three pleasant companions. She could not help herself. She was carried on, with Mr. Lane chatting beside her — though the sight of the shining terrace, with its moonlit crowd of figures, breathed into her a terror and pain she could hardly control.

"Come and look at the water," she said to Mr. Lane; "I would rather not walk up and down if you don't mind."

He thought she was tired, and politely led her through the sitting or promenading groups till once more she was leaning over the parapet, now trying to talk, now to absorb herself in the magic of bridge, river, and sky, but in reality listening all the time with a shrinking heart for the voices and the footfalls that she dreaded. Lady Winterbourne, above all! How unlucky! It was only that morning that she had received a forwarded letter from that old friend, asking urgently for news and her address.

"Well, how did you like the speech to-night — *the* speech?" said Mr. Lane, a genial Gladstonian member, more heavily weighted with estates than with ideas. "It was splendid, wasn't it? — in the way of speaking. Speeches like that are a safety-valve — that's my view of it. Have 'em out — all these ideas — get 'em discussed!" — with a good-humoured shake of the head for emphasis. "Does nobody any harm and may do good. I can tell you, Miss Boyce, the House of Commons is a capital place for taming these clever young men! — you must give them their head — and they make excellent fellows after a bit. Why — who's this? — My dear Lady Winterbourne! — this *is* a sight for sair een!"

And the portly member with great effusion grasped the hand of a stately lady in black, whose abundant white hair caught the moonlight.

"*Marcella!*" cried a woman's voice.

Yes — there he was! — close behind Lady Winterbourne. In the soft darkness he and his party had run upon the two persons talking over the wall without an idea — a suspicion.

She hurriedly withdrew herself from Lady Winterbourne, hesitated a second, then held out her hand to him. The light was behind him. She could not see his face in the darkness; but she was suddenly and strangely conscious of the whole scene — of the great dark building with its lines of fairy-lit gothic windows — the blue gulf of the river crossed by lines of wavering light — the swift passage of a steamer with its illuminated saloon and crowded deck — of the wonderful mixture of moonlight and sunset in the air and sky — of this dark figure in front of her.

Their hands touched. Was there a murmured word from him? She did not know; she was too agitated, too unhappy to hear it if there was. She threw herself upon Lady Winterbourne, in whom she divined at once a tremor almost equal to her own.

"Oh! do come with me — come away! — I want to talk to you!" she said incoherently under her breath, drawing Lady Winterbourne with a strong hand.

Lady Winterbourne yielded, bewildered, and they moved along the terrace.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" cried the elder lady — "to think of finding *you* here! How astonishing — how — how dreadful! No! — I don't mean that. Of

course you and he must meet — but it was only yesterday he told me he had never seen you again — since — and it gave me a turn. I was very foolish just now. There now — stay here a moment — and tell me about yourself."

And again they paused by the river, the girl glancing nervously behind her as though she were in a company of ghosts. Lady Winterbourne recovered herself, and Marcella, looking at her, saw the old tragic severity of feature and mien blurred with the same softness, the same delicate tremor. Marcella clung to her with almost a daughter's feeling. She took up the white wrinkled hand as it lay on the parapet, and kissed it in the dark so that no one saw.

"I *am* glad to see you again," she said passionately, "so glad!"

Lady Winterbourne was surprised and moved.

"But you have never written all these months, you unkind child! And I have heard so little of you — your mother never seemed to know. When will you come and see me — or shall I come to you? I can't stay now, for we were just going; my daughter, Ermyntrude Welwyn, has to take some one to a ball. How *strange*" — she broke off — "how very strange that you and he should have met to-night! He goes off to Italy to-morrow, you know, with Lord Maxwell."

"Yes, I had heard," said Marcella, more steadily. "Will you come to tea with me next week? — Oh, I will write. — And we must go too — where *can* my friend be?"

She looked round in dismay, and up and down the terrace for Edith.

"I will take you back to the Lanes, anyway," said Lady Winterbourne; "or shall we look after you?"

"No! no! Take me back to the Lanes."

"Mamma, are you coming?" said a voice like a softened version of Lady Winterbourne's. Then something small and thin ran forward, and a girl's voice said piteously:

"*Dear* Lady Winterbourne, my frock and my hair take *so* long to do! I shall be cross with my maid, and look like a fiend. Ermyntrude will be sorry she ever knew me. *Do* come!"

"Don't cry, Betty. I certainly shan't take you if you do!" said Lady Ermyntrude, laughing. "Mamma, is this Miss Boyce — *your* Miss Boyce?"

She and Marcella shook hands, and they talked a little, Lady Ermyntrude under cover of the darkness looking hard and curiously at the tall stranger whom, as it happened, she had never seen before. Marcella had little notion of what she was saying. She was far more conscious of the girlish form hanging on Lady Winterbourne's arm than she was of her own words, of "Betty's" beautiful soft eyes — also shyly and gravely fixed upon herself — under that marvellous cloud of fair hair; the long, pointed chin; the whimsical little face.

"Well, none of *you* are any good!" said Betty at last, in a tragic voice. "I shall have to walk home my own poor little self, and 'ask a p'leeceman.' Mr. Raeburn!"

He disengaged himself from a group behind and came — with no alacrity. Betty ran up to him.

"Mr. Raeburn! Ermyntrude and Lady Winter-

bourne are going to sleep here, if you don't mind making arrangements. But *I* want a hansom."

At that very moment Marcella caught sight of Edith strolling along towards her with a couple of members, and chatting as though the world had never rolled more evenly.

"Oh! there she is — there is my friend!" cried Marcella to Lady Winterbourne. "Good-night — good-night!"

She was hurrying off when she saw Aldous Raeburn was standing alone a moment. The exasperated Betty had made a dart from his side to "collect" another straying member of the party.

An impulse she could not master scattered her wretched discomfort — even her chafing sense of being the observed of many eyes. She walked up to him.

"Will you tell me about Lord Maxwell?" she said in a tremulous hurry. "I am so sorry he is ill — I hadn't heard — I —"

She dared not look up. Was that *his* voice answering?

"Thank you. We have been very anxious about him; but the doctors to-day give a rather better report. We take him abroad to-morrow."

"Marcella! at last!" cried Edith Craven, catching hold of her friend; "you lost me? Oh, nonsense; it was all the other way. But look, there is Mr. Wharton coming out. I must go — come and say good-night — everybody is departing."

Aldous Raeburn lifted his hat. Marcella felt a sudden rush of humiliation — pain — sore resentment. That cold, strange tone — those unwilling words! —

She had gone up to him — as undisciplined in her repentance as she had been in aggression — full of a passionate yearning to make friends — somehow to convey to him that she "was sorry," in the old child's phrase which her self-willed childhood had used so little. There could be no misunderstanding possible! He of all men knew best how irrevocable it all was. But why, when life has brought reflection, and you realise at last that you have vitally hurt, perhaps maimed, another human being, should it not be possible to fling conventions aside, and go to that human being with the frank confession which by all the promises of ethics and religion *ought* to bring peace — peace and a soothed conscience?

But she had been repulsed — put aside, so she took it — and by one of the kindest and most generous of men! She moved along the terrace in a maze, seeing nothing, biting her lip to keep back the angry tears. All that obscure need, that new stirring of moral life within her — which had found issue in this little futile advance towards a man who had once loved her and could now, it seemed, only despise and dislike her — was beating and swelling stormlike within her. She had taken being loved so easily, so much as a matter of course! How was it that it hurt her now so much to have lost love, and power, and consideration? She had never felt any passion for Aldous Raeburn — had taken him lightly and shaken him off with a minimum of remorse. Yet to-night a few cold words from him — the proud manner of a moment — had inflicted a smart upon her she could hardly bear. They had made her feel herself so alone, unhappy, uncared for!

But, on the contrary, she *must* be happy! — *must* be loved! To this, and this only, had she been brought by the hard experience of this strenuous year.

"Oh, Mrs. Lane, *be* an angel!" exclaimed Wharton's voice. "Just one turn — five minutes! The division will be called directly, and then we will all thank our stars and go to bed!"

In another instant he was at Marcella's side, bare-headed, radiant, reckless even, as he was wont to be in moments of excitement. He had seen her speak to Raeburn as he came out on the terrace, but his mind was too full for any perception of other people's situations — even hers. He was absorbed with himself, and with her, as she fitted his present need. The smile of satisfied vanity, of stimulated ambition, was on his lips; and his good-humour inclined him more than ever to Marcella, and the pleasure of a woman's company. He passed with ease from triumph to homage; his talk now audacious, now confiding, offered her a deference, a flattery, to which, as he was fully conscious, the events of the evening had lent a new prestige.

She, too, in his eyes, had triumphed — had made her mark. His ears were full of the comments made upon her to-night by the little world on the terrace. If it were not for money — *hateful* money! — what more brilliant wife could be desired for any rising man?

So the five minutes lengthened into ten, and by the time the division was called, and Wharton hurried off, Marcella, soothed, taken out of herself, rescued from the emptiness and forlornness of a tragic moment, had given him more conscious cause than she had ever given him yet to think her kind and fair.

CHAPTER X.

"My dear Ned, do be reasonable! Your sister is in despair, and so am I. Why do you torment us by staying on here in the heat, and taking all these engagements, which you know you are no more fit for than —"

"A sick grasshopper," laughed Hallin. "Healthy wretch! Did Heaven give you that sun-burn only that you might come home from Italy and twit us weaklings? Do you think I *want* to look as rombustious as you? 'Nothing too much,' my good friend!"

Aldous looked down upon the speaker with an anxiety quite untouched by Hallin's "chaff."

"Miss Hallin tells me," he persisted, "that you are wearing yourself out with this lecturing campaign, that you don't sleep, and that she is more unhappy about you than she has been for months. Why not give it up now, rest, and begin again in the winter?"

Hallin smiled a little as he sat with the tips of his fingers lightly joined in front of him.

"I doubt whether I shall live through the winter," he said quietly.

Raeburn started. Hallin in general spoke of his health, when he allowed it to be mentioned at all, in the most cheerful terms.

"Why you should behave as though you *wished* to make such a prophecy true I can't conceive!" he said in impatient pain.

Hallin offered no immediate answer, and Raeburn, who was standing in front of him, leaning against the wood-work of the open window, looked unhappily at the face and form of his friend. In youth that face had possessed a Greek serenity and blitheness, dependent perhaps on its clear aquiline feature, the steady transparent eyes — *cœli lucida templa* — the fresh fairness of the complexion, and the boyish brow under its arch of pale brown hair. And to stronger men there had always been something peculiarly winning in the fragile grace of figure and movements, suggesting, as they did, sad and perpetual compromise between the spirit's eagerness and the body's weakness.

"Don't make yourself unhappy, my dear boy," said Hallin at last, putting up a thin hand and touching his friend — "I *shall* give up soon. Moreover, it will give me up. Workmen want to do something else with their evenings in July than spend them in listening to stuffy lectures. I shall go to the Lakes. But there are a few engagements still ahead, and — I confess I am more restless than I used to be. The night cometh when no man can work."

They fell into a certain amount of discursive talk — of the political situation, working-class opinion, and the rest. Raeburn had been alive now for some time to a curious change of balance in his friend's mind. Hallin's buoyant youth had concerned itself almost entirely with positive crusades and enthusiasms. Of late he seemed rather to have passed into a period of

negations, of strong opposition to certain current *isms* and faiths; and the happy boyish tone of earlier years had become the "stormy note of men contention-tost," which belongs, indeed, as truly to such a character as the joy of young ideals.

He had always been to some extent divided from Raeburn and others of his early friends by his passionate democracy — his belief in, and trust of, the multitude. For Hallin, the divine originating life was realised and manifested through the common humanity and its struggle, as a whole; for Raeburn, only in the best of it, morally or intellectually; the rest remaining an inscrutable problem, which did not, indeed, prevent faith, but hung upon it like a dead weight. Such divisions, however, are among the common divisions of thinking men, and had never interfered with the friendship of these two in the least.

But the developing alienation between Hallin and hundreds of his working-men friends was of an infinitely keener and sorer kind. Since he had begun his lecturing and propagandist life, Socialist ideas of all kinds had made great way in England. And, on the whole, as the prevailing type of them grew stronger, Hallin's sympathy with them had grown weaker and weaker. Property to him meant "self-realisation"; and the abuse of property was no more just ground for a crusade which logically aimed at doing away with it, than the abuse of other human powers or instincts would make it reasonable to try and do away with — say love, or religion. To give property, and therewith the fuller human opportunity, to those that have none, was the inmost desire of his life.

And not merely common property — though like all true soldiers of the human cause he believed that common property will be in the future enormously extended — but in the first place, and above all, to distribute the discipline and the trust of personal and private possession among an infinitely greater number of hands than possess them already. And that not for wealth's sake — though a more equal distribution of property, and therewith of capacity, must inevitably tend to wealth — but for the soul's sake, and for the sake of that continuous appropriation by the race of its moral and spiritual heritage.

How is it to be done? Hallin, like many others, would have answered — "For England — mainly by a fresh distribution of the land." Not, of course, by violence — which only means the worst form of waste known to history — but by the continuous pressure of an emancipating legislation, relieving land from shackles long since struck off other kinds of property — by the assertion, within a certain limited range, of communal initiative and control — and above all by the continuous private effort in all sorts of ways and spheres of "men of good will." For all sweeping uniform schemes he had the natural contempt of the student — or the moralist. To imagine that by nationalising sixty annual millions of rent for instance you could make England a city of God, was not only a vain dream, but a belittling of England's history and England's task. A nation is not saved so cheaply! — and to see those energies turned to land nationalisation or the scheming of a Collectivist millennium, which might have gone to the housing, educating, and

refining of English men, women, and children of to-day, to moralising the employer's view of his profit, and the landlord's conception of his estate — filled him with a growing despair.

The relation of such a habit of life and mind to the Collectivist and Socialist ideas now coming to the front in England, as in every other European country, is obvious enough. To Hallin the social life, the community, was everything — yet to be a "Socialist" seemed to him more and more to be a traitor! He would have built his state on the purified will of the individual man, and could conceive no other foundation for a state worth having. But for purification there must be effort, and for effort there must be freedom. Socialism, as he read it, despised and decried freedom, and placed the good of man wholly in certain external conditions. It was aiming at a state of things under which the joys and pains, the teaching and the risks of true possession, were to be for ever shut off from the poor human will, which yet, according to him, could never do without them, if man was to be man.

So that he saw it all *sub specie æternitatis*, as a matter not of economic theory, but rather of religion. Raeburn, as they talked, shrank in dismay from the burning intensity of mood underlying his controlled speech. He spoke, for instance, of Bennett's conversion to Harry Wharton's proposed bill, or of the land nationalising scheme he was spending all his slender stores of breath and strength in attacking, not with anger or contempt, but with a passionate sorrow which seemed to Raeburn preposterous! intolerable! — to

be exhausting in him the very springs and sources of a too precarious life. There rose in Aldous at last an indignant protest which yet could hardly find itself words. What help to have softened the edge and fury of religious war, only to discover new antagonisms of opinion as capable of devastating heart and affections as any *homoousion* of old? Had they not already cost him love? Were they also, in another fashion, to cost him his friend?

"Ah, dear old fellow — enough!" said Hallin at last — "take me back to Italy! You have told me so little — such a niggardly little!"

"I told you that we went and I came back in a water-spout," said Aldous; "the first rain in Northern Italy for four months — worse luck! 'Rain at Reggio, rain at Parma. — At Lodi rain, Piacenza rain!' — that might about stand for my diary, except for one radiant day when my aunt, Betty Macdonald, and I descended on Milan, and climbed the Duomo."

"Did Miss Betty amuse you?"

Aldous laughed.

"Well, at least she varied the programme. The greater part of our day in Milan Aunt Neta and I spent in rushing after her like its tail after a kite. First of all, she left us in the Duomo Square, running like a deer, and presently, to Aunt Neta's horror, we discovered that she was pursuing a young Italian officer in a blue cloak. When we came up with the pair she was inquiring, in her best Italian, where the 'Signor' got his cloak, because positively she must have one like it, and he, cap in hand, was explaining to the Signorina

that if she would but follow him round the corner to his military tailor's, she could be supplied on the spot. So there we all went, Miss Betty insisting. You can imagine Aunt Neta. She bought a small shipload of stuff — and then positively skipped for joy in the street outside — the amazed officer looking on. And as for her career over the roof of the Duomo — the agitation of it nearly brought my aunt to destruction — and even I heaved a sigh of relief when I got them both down safe."

"Is the creature all tricks?" said Hallin, with a smile. "As you talk of her to me I get the notion of a little monkey just cut loose from a barrel organ."

"Oh! but the monkey has so much heart," said Aldous, laughing again, as every one was apt to laugh who talked about Betty Macdonald, "and it makes friends with every sick and sorry creature it comes across, especially with old maids! It amounts to genius, Betty's way with old maids. You should see her in the middle of them in the hotel *salon* at night — a perfect ring of them — and the men outside, totally neglected, and out of temper. I have never seen Betty yet in a room with somebody she thought ill at ease, or put in the shade — a governess, or a schoolgirl, or a lumpish boy — that she did not devote herself to that somebody. It is a pretty instinct; I have often wondered whether it is nature or art."

He fell silent, still smiling. Hallin watched him closely. Perhaps the thought which had risen in his mind revealed itself by some subtle sign or other to Aldous. For suddenly Raeburn's expression changed; the over-strenuous, harassed look, which of late had

somewhat taken the place of his old philosopher's quiet, reappeared.

"I did not tell you, Hallin," he began, in a low voice, raising his eyes to his friend, "that I had seen her again."

Hallin paused a moment. Then he said:

"No. I knew she went to the House to hear Wharton's speech, and that she dined there. I supposed she might just have come across you — but she said nothing."

"Of course, I had no idea," said Aldous; "suddenly Lady Winterbourne and I came across her on the terrace. Then I saw she was with that man's party. She spoke to me afterwards — I believe now — she meant to be kind" — his voice showed the difficulty he had in speaking at all — "but I saw him coming up to talk to her. I am ashamed to think of my own manner, but I could not help myself."

His face and eye took, as he spoke, a peculiar vividness and glow. Raeburn had not for months mentioned to him the name of Marcella Boyce, but Hallin had all along held two faiths about the matter: first, that Aldous was still possessed by a passion which had become part of his life; secondly, that the events of the preceding year had produced in him an exceedingly bitter sense of ill-usage, of a type which Hallin had not perhaps expected.

"Did you see anything to make you suppose," he asked quietly, after a pause, "that she is going to marry him?"

"No — no," Aldous repeated slowly; "but she is clearly on friendly, perhaps intimate, terms with him.

And just now, of course, she is more likely to be influenced by him than ever. He made a great success — of a kind — in the House a fortnight ago. People seem to think he may come rapidly to the front."

"So I understand. I don't believe it. The jealousies that divide that group are too unmanageable. If he *were* a Parnell! But he lacks just the qualities that matter — the reticence, the power of holding himself aloof from irrelevant things and interests, the hard self-concentration."

Aldous raised his shoulders.

"I don't imagine there is any lack of that! But certainly he holds himself aloof from nothing and nobody! I hear of him everywhere."

"What! — among the smart people?"

Aldous nodded.

"A change of policy by all accounts," said Hallin, musing. "He must do it with intention. He is not the man to let himself be be-Capua-ed all at once."

"Oh dear, no!" said Aldous, drily. "He does it with intention. Nobody supposes him to be the mere toady. All the same I think he may very well overrate the importance of the class he is trying to make use of, and its influence. Have you been following the strike 'leaders' in the *Clarion?*"

"No!" cried Hallin, flushing. "I would not read them for the world! I might not be able to go on giving to the strike."

Aldous fell silent, and Hallin presently saw that his mind had harked back to the one subject that really held the depths of it. The truest friendship, Hallin believed, would be never to speak to him of Marcella

Boyce — never to encourage him to dwell upon her, or upon anything connected with her. But his yearning, sympathetic instinct would not let him follow his own conviction.

"Miss Boyce, you know, has been here two or three times while you have been away," he said quickly, as he got up to post a letter.

Aldous hesitated; then he said —

"Do you gather that her nursing life satisfies her?"

Hallin made a little face.

"Since when has she become a person likely to be 'satisfied' with anything? She devotes to it a splendid and wonderful energy. When she comes here I admire her with all my heart, and pity her so much that I could cry over her!"

Aldous started.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, as he too rose and laid his hand on Hallin's for a moment. "But don't tell me! It's best for me not to talk of her. If she were associated in my mind with any other man than Wharton, I think somehow I could throw the whole thing off. But this — this —" He broke off; then resumed, while he pretended to look for a parcel he had brought with him, by way of covering an agitation he could not suppress. "A person you and I know said to me the other day, 'It may sound unromantic, but I could never think of a woman who had thrown me over except *with ill-will*.' The word astonished me, but sometimes I understand it. I find myself full of *anger* to the most futile, the most ridiculous degree!"

He drew himself up nervously, already scorning his

own absurdity, his own breach of reticence. Hallin laid his hands on the taller man's shoulders, and there was a short pause.

"Never mind, old fellow," said Hallin, simply, at last, as his hands dropped; "let's go and do our work. What is it you're after? — I forget."

Aldous found his packet and his hat, explaining himself again, meanwhile, in his usual voice. He had dropped in on Hallin for a morning visit, meaning to spend some hours before the House met in the investigation of some small workshops in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane. The Home Office had been called upon for increased inspection and regulation; there had been a great conflict of evidence, and Aldous had finally resolved in his student's way to see for himself the state of things in two or three selected streets.

It was a matter on which Hallin was also well-informed, and felt strongly. They stayed talking about it a few minutes, Hallin eagerly directing Raeburn's attention to the two or three points where he thought the Government could really do good.

Then Raeburn turned to go.

"I shall come and drag you out to-morrow afternoon," he said, as he opened the door.

"You needn't," said Hallin, with a smile; "in fact, don't; I shall have my jaunt."

Whereby Aldous understood that he would be engaged in his common Saturday practice of taking out a batch of elder boys or girls from one or other of the schools of which he was manager, for a walk or to see some sight.

"If it's your boys," he said, protesting, "you're not fit for it. Hand them over to me."

"Nothing of the sort," said Hallin, gaily, and turned him out of the room.

Raeburn found the walk from Hallin's Bloomsbury quarters to Drury Lane hot and airless. The planes were already drooping and yellowing in the squares, the streets were at their closest and dirtiest, and the traffic of Holborn and its approaches had never seemed to him more bewildering in its roar and volume. July was in, and all freshness had already disappeared from the too short London summer.

For Raeburn on this particular afternoon there was a curious forlornness in the dry and tainted air. His slack mood found no bracing in the sun or the breeze. Everything was or seemed distasteful to a mind out of tune — whether this work he was upon, which only yesterday had interested him considerably, or his Parliamentary occupations, or some tiresome estate business which would have to be looked into when he got home. He was oppressed, too, by the last news of his grandfather. The certainty that this dear and honoured life, with which his own had been so closely intertwined since his boyhood, was drawing to its close weighed upon him now heavily and constantly. The loss itself would take from him an object on which affection — checked and thwarted elsewhere — was still free to spend itself in ways peculiarly noble and tender; and as for those other changes to which the first great change must lead — his transference to the Upper House, and the extension for himself of all the cere-

monial side of life — he looked forward to them with an intense and resentful repugnance, as to aggravations, perversely thrust on him from without, of a great and necessary grief. Few men believed less happily in democracy than Aldous Raeburn; on the other hand, few men felt a more steady distaste for certain kinds of inequality.

He was to meet a young inspector at the corner of Little Queen Street, and they were to visit together a series of small brush-drawing and box-making workshops in the Drury Lane district, to which the attention of the Department had lately been specially drawn. Aldous had no sooner crossed Holborn than he saw his man waiting for him, a tall strip of a fellow, with a dark bearded face, and a manner which shyness had made a trifle morose. Aldous, however, knew him to be not only a capital worker, but a man of parts, and had got much information and some ideas out of him already. Mr. Peabody gave the under-secretary a slight preoccupied smile in return for his friendly greeting, and the two walked on together talking.

The inspector announced that he proposed to take his companion first of all to a street behind Drury Lane, of which many of the houses were already marked for demolition — a "black street," bearing a peculiarly vile reputation in the neighbourhood. It contained on the whole the worst of the small workshops which he desired to bring to Raeburn's notice, besides a variety of other horrors, social and sanitary.

After ten minutes' walking they turned into the street. With its condemned houses, many of them shored up and windowless, its narrow roadway strewn

with costers' refuse — it was largely inhabited by costers frequenting Covent Garden Market — its filthy gutters and broken pavements, it touched, indeed, a depth of sinister squalor beyond most of its fellows. The air was heavy with odours which, in this July heat, seemed to bear with them the inmost essences of things sickening and decaying; and the children, squatting or playing amid the garbage of the street, were further than most of their kind from any tolerable human type.

A policeman was stationed near the entrance of the street. After they had passed him, Mr. Peabody ran back and said a word in his ear.

"I gave him your name," he said briefly, in answer to Raeburn's interrogative look, when he returned, "and told him what we were after. The street is not quite as bad as it was; and there are little oases of respectability in it you would never expect. But there is plenty of the worst thieving and brutality left in it still. Of course, now you see it at its dull moment. To-night the place will swarm with barrows and stalls, all the people will be in the street, and after dark it will be as near pandemonium as may be. I happen to know the School Board visitor of these parts; and a City Missionary, too, who is afraid of nothing."

And standing still a moment, pointing imperceptibly to right and left, he began in his shy, monotonous voice to run through the inhabitants of some of the houses and a few typical histories. This group was mainly peopled by women of the very lowest class and their "bullies" — that is to say, the men who aided

them in plundering, sometimes in murdering, the stranger who fell into their claws; in that house a woman had been slowly done to death by her husband and his brutal brothers under every circumstance of tragic horror; in the next a case of flagrant and revolting cruelty to a pair of infant children had just been brought to light. In addition to its vice and its thievery, the wretched place was, of course, steeped in drink. There were gin-palaces at all the corners; the women drank, in proportion to their resources, as badly as the men, and the children were fed with the stuff in infancy, and began for themselves as early as they could beg or steal a copper of their own.

When the dismal catalogue was done, they moved on towards the further end of the street, and a house on the right hand side. Behind the veil of his official manner Aldous's shrinking sense took all it saw and heard as fresh food for a darkness and despondency of soul already great enough. But his companion — a young enthusiast, secretly very critical of "big-wigs" — was conscious only of the trained man of affairs, courteous, methodical, and well-informed, putting a series of preliminary questions with unusual point and rapidity.

Suddenly, under the influence of a common impression, both men stood still and looked about them. There was a stir in the street. Windows had been thrown open, and scores of heads were looking out. People emerged from all quarters, seemed to spring from the ground or drop from the skies, and in a few seconds, as it were, the street, so dead-alive before, was full of a running and shouting crowd.

"It's a fight!" said Peabody, as the crowd came up with them. "Listen!"

Shrieks — of the most ghastly and piercing note, rang through the air. The men and women who rushed past the two strangers — hustling them, yet too excited to notice them — were all making for a house some ten or twelve yards in front of them, to their left. Aldous had turned white.

"It is a woman!" he said, after an instant's listening, "and it sounds like murder. You go back for that policeman!"

And without another word he threw himself on the crowd, forcing his way through it by the help of arms and shoulders which, in years gone by, had done good service for the Trinity Eight. Drink-sodden men and screaming women gave way before him. He found himself at the door of the house, hammering upon it with two or three other men who were there before him. The noise from within was appalling — cries, groans, uproar — all the sounds of a deadly struggle proceeding apparently on the second floor of the house. Then came a heavy fall — then the sound of a voice, different in quality and accent from any that had gone before, crying piteously and as though in exhaustion — "Help!"

Almost at the same moment the door which Aldous and his companions were trying to force was burst open from within, and three men seemed to be shot out from the dark passage inside — two wrestling with the third, a wild beast in human shape, maddened apparently with drink, and splashed with blood.

"Ee's done for her!" shouted one of the captors; "an' for the Sister too!"

"The Sister!" shrieked a woman behind Aldous — "it's the nuss he means! I sor her go in when I wor at my window half an hour ago. Oh! yer *blackguard*, you!" — and she would have fallen upon the wretch, in a frenzy, had not the bystanders caught hold of her.

"Stand back!" cried a policeman. Three of them had come up at Peabody's call. The man was instantly secured, and the crowd pushed back.

Aldous was already upstairs.

"Which room?" he asked of a group of women crying and cowering on the first landing — for all sounds from above had ceased.

"Third floor front," cried one of them. "We all of us *begged* and *implored* of that young person, sir, not to go a-near him! Didn't we, Betsy? — didn't we, Doll?"

Aldous ran up.

On the third floor, the door of the front room was open. A woman lay on the ground, apparently beaten to death.

By her side, torn, dishevelled, and gasping, knelt Marcella Boyce. Two or three other women were standing by in helpless terror and curiosity. Marcella was bending over the bleeding victim before her. Her own left arm hung as though disabled by her side; but with the right hand she was doing her best to staunch some of the bleeding from the head. Her bag stood open beside her, and one of the chattering women was handing her what she asked for. The sight stamped itself in lines of horror on Raeburn's heart.

In such an exaltation of nerve *she* could be surprised

at nothing. When she saw Raeburn enter the room, she did not even start.

"I think," she said, as he stooped down to her — speaking with pauses, as though to get her breath — "he has — killed her. But there — is a chance. Are the — police there — and a stretcher?"

Two constables entered as she spoke, and the first of them instantly sent his companion back for a stretcher. Then, noticing Marcella's nursing dress and cloak, he came up to her respectfully.

"Did you see it, miss?"

"I — I tried to separate them," she replied, still speaking with the same difficulty, while she silently motioned to Aldous, who was on the other side of the unconscious and apparently dying woman, to help her with the bandage she was applying. "But he was — such a great — powerful brute."

Aldous, hating the clumsiness of his man's fingers, knelt down and tried to help her. Her trembling hand touched, mingled with his.

"I was downstairs," she went on, while the constable took out his note-book, "attending a child — that's ill — when I heard the screams. They were on the landing; he had turned her out of the room — then rushed after her — I *think* — to throw her downstairs — I stopped that. Then he took up something — oh! there it is!" She shuddered, pointing to a broken piece of a chair which lay on the floor. "He was quite mad with drink — I couldn't — do much."

Her voice slipped into a weak, piteous note.

"Isn't your arm hurt?" said Aldous, pointing to it.

"It's not broken — it's wrenched; I can't use it.

There — that's all we can do — till she gets — to hospital."

Then she stood up, pale and staggering, and asked the policeman if he could put on a bandage. The man had got his ambulance certificate, and was proud to say that he could. She took a roll out of her bag, and quietly pointed to her arm. He did his best, not without skill, and the deep line of pain furrowing the centre of the brow relaxed a little. Then she sank down on the floor again beside her patient, gazing at the woman's marred face — indescribably patient in its deep unconsciousness — at the gnarled and blood-stained hands, with their wedding-ring; at the thin locks of torn grey hair — with tears that ran unheeded down her cheeks, in a passion of anguished pity, which touched a chord of memory in Raeburn's mind. He had seen her look so once before — beside Minta Hurd, on the day of Hurd's capture.

At the same moment he saw that they were alone. The policeman had cleared the room, and was spending the few minutes that must elapse before his companion returned with the stretcher, in taking the names and evidence of some of the inmates of the house, on the stairs outside.

"You can't do anything more," said Aldous, gently, bending over her. "Won't you let me take you home? — you want it sorely. The police are trained to these things, and I have a friend here who will help. They will remove her with every care — he will see to it."

Then for the first time her absorption gave way. She remembered who he was — where they were —

how they had last met. And with the remembrance came an extraordinary leap of joy, flashing through pain and faintness. She had the childish feeling that he could not look unkindly at her any more — after this! When at the White House she had got herself into disgrace, and could not bring her pride to ask pardon, she would silently set up a headache or a cut finger that she might be pitied, and so, perforce, forgiven. The same tacit thought was in her mind now. No! — after this he *must* be friends with her.

"I will just help to get her downstairs," she said, but with a quivering, appealing accent — and so they fell silent.

Aldous looked round the room — at the miserable filthy garret with its begrimed and peeling wall-paper, its two or three broken chairs, its heap of rags across two boxes that served for a bed, its empty gin-bottles here and there — all the familiar, one might almost say conventionalised, signs of human ruin and damnation — then at this breathing death between himself and her. Perhaps his strongest feeling was one of fierce and natural protest against circumstance — against her mother! — against a reckless philanthropy that could thus throw the finest and fragilest things of a poorly-furnished world into such a hopeless struggle with devildom.

"I have been here several times before," she said presently, in a faint voice, "and there has never been any trouble. By day the street is not much worse than others — though, of course, it has a bad name. There is a little boy on the next floor very ill with typhoid. Many of the women in the house are very

good to him and his mother. This poor thing — used to come in and out — when I was nursing him — Oh, I wish — I *wish* they would come!" she broke off in impatience, looking at the deathly form — "every moment is of importance!"

As Aldous went to the door to see if the stretcher was in sight, it opened, and the police came in. Marcella, herself helpless, directed the lifting of the bloodstained head; the police obeyed her with care and skill. Then Raeburn assisted in the carrying downstairs, and presently the police with their burden, and accompanied apparently by the whole street, were on their way to the nearest hospital.

Then Aldous, to his despair and wrath, saw that an inspector of police, who had just come up, was talking to Marcella, no doubt instructing her as to how and where she was to give her evidence. She was leaning against the passage wall, supporting her injured arm with her hand, and seemed to him on the point of fainting.

"Get a cab at once, will you!" he said peremptorily to Peabody; then going up to the inspector he drew him forward. They exchanged a few words, the inspector lifted his cap, and Aldous went back to Marcella.

"There is a cab here," he said to her. "Come, please, directly. They will not trouble you any more for the present."

He led her out through the still lingering crowd and put her into the cab. As they drove along, he felt every jolt and roughness of the street as though he were himself in anguish. She was some time

before she recovered the jar of pain caused her by the act of getting into the cab. Her breath came fast, and he could see that she was trying hard to control herself and not to faint.

He, too, restrained himself so far as not to talk to her. But the exasperation, the revolt within, was in truth growing unmanageably. Was this what her new career — her enthusiasms — meant, or might mean! Twenty-three! — in the prime of youth, of charm! Horrible, unpardonable waste! He could not bear it, could not submit himself to it.

Oh! let her marry Wharton, or any one else, so long as it were made impossible for her to bruise and exhaust her young bloom amid such scenes — such gross physical abominations. Amazing! — how meanly, passionately timorous the man of Raeburn's type can be for the woman! He himself may be morally "ever a fighter," and feel the glow, the stern joy of the fight. But she! — let her leave the human brute and his unsavoury struggle alone! It cannot be borne — it was never meant — that she should dip her delicate wings, of her own free will at least, in such a mire of blood and tears. It was the feeling that had possessed him when Mrs. Boyce told him of the visit to the prison, the night in the cottage.

In her whirl of feverish thought, she divined him very closely. Presently, as he watched her — hating the man for driving and the cab for shaking — he saw her white lips suddenly smile.

"I know," she said, rousing herself to look at him; "you think nursing is all like that!"

"I hope not!" he said, with effort, trying to smile too.

"I never saw a fight before," she said, shutting her eyes again. "Nobody is ever rude to us — I often pine for experiences!"

How like her old, wild tone! His rigid look softened involuntarily.

"Well, you have got one now," he said, bending over to her. "Does your arm hurt you much?"

"Yes, — but I can bear it. What vexes me is that I shall have to give up work for a bit. — Mr. Raeburn!"

"Yes." His heart beat.

"We may meet often — mayn't we? — at Lady Winterbourne's — or in the country? Couldn't we be friends? You don't know how often —" She turned away her weary head a moment — gathered strength to begin again — "— how often I have regretted — last year. I see now — that I behaved — more unkindly" — her voice was almost a whisper — "than I thought then. But it is all done with — couldn't we just be good friends — understand each other, perhaps, better than we ever did?"

She kept her eyes closed, shaken with alternate shame and daring.

As for him, he was seized with overpowering dumbness and chill. What was really in his mind was the Terrace — was Wharton's advancing figure. But her state — the moment — coerced him.

"We could not be anything but friends," he said gently, but with astonishing difficulty; and then could find nothing more to say. She knew his reserve, however, and would not this time be repelled.

She put out her hand.

"No!" she said, looking at it and withdrawing it with a shudder; "oh no!"

Then suddenly a passion of tears and trembling overcame her. She leant against the side of the cab, struggling in vain to regain her self-control, gasping incoherent things about the woman she had not been able to save. He tried to soothe and calm her, his own heart wrung. But she hardly heard him.

At last they turned into Maine Street, and she saw the gateway of Brown's Buildings.

"Here we are," she said faintly, summoning all her will; "do you know you will have to help me across that court, and upstairs — then I shan't be any more trouble."

So, leaning on Raeburn's arm, Marcella made her slow progress across the court of Brown's Buildings and through the gaping groups of children. Then at the top of her flight of steps she withdrew herself from him with a wan smile.

"Now I am home," she said. "Good-bye!"

Aldous looked round him well at Brown's Buildings as he departed. Then he got into a hansom, and drove to Lady Winterbourne's house, and implored her to fetch and nurse Marcella Boyce, using her best cleverness to hide all motion of his in the matter.

After which he spent — poor Aldous! — one of the most restless and miserable nights of his life.

CHAPTER XI.

MARCELLA was sitting in a deep and comfortable chair at the open window of Lady Winterbourne's drawing-room. The house — in James Street, Buckingham Gate — looked out over the exercising ground of the great barracks in front, and commanded the greenery of St. James's Park to the left. The planes lining the barrack railings were poor, wilted things, and London was as hot as ever. Still the charm of these open spaces of sky and park, after the high walls and innumerable windows of Brown's Buildings, was very great; Marcella wanted nothing more but to lie still, to dally with a book, to dream as she pleased, and to be let alone.

Lady Winterbourne and her married daughter, Lady Ermyntrude, were still out, engaged in the innumerable nothings of the fashionable afternoon. Marcella had her thoughts to herself.

But they were not of a kind that any one need have wished to share. In the first place, she was tired of idleness. In the early days after Lady Winterbourne had carried her off, the soft beds and sofas, the trained service and delicate food of this small but luxurious house had been so pleasant to her that she had scorned herself for a greedy Sybaritic temper, delighted by any means to escape from plain living. But she had been here a fortnight, and was now pining to go back

to work. Her mood was too restless and transitional to leave her long in love with comfort and folded hands. She told herself that she had no longer any place among the rich and important people of this world; far away beyond these parks and palaces, in the little network of dark streets she knew, lay the problems and the cares that were really hers, through which her heart was somehow wrestling — must somehow wrestle — its passionate way. But her wrenched arm was still in a sling, and was, moreover, undergoing treatment at the hands of a clever specialist; and she could neither go home, as her mother had wished her to do, nor return to her nursing — a state of affairs which of late had made her a little silent and moody.

On the whole she found her chief pleasure in the two weekly visits she paid to the woman whose life, it now appeared, she *had* saved — probably at some risk of her own. The poor victim would go scarred and maimed through what remained to her of existence. But she lived; and — as Marcella and Lady Winterbourne and Raeburn had abundantly made up their minds — would be permanently cared for and comforted in the future.

Alas! there were many things that stood between Marcella and true rest. She had been woefully disappointed, nay wounded, as to the results of that tragic half-hour which for the moment had seemed to throw a bridge of friendship over those painful, estranging memories lying between her and Aldous Raeburn. He had called two or three times since she had been with Lady Winterbourne; he had done his

best to make her inevitable appearance as a witness in the police-court, as easy to her as possible; the man who had stood by her through such a scene could do no less, in common politeness and humanity. But each time they met his manner had been formal and constrained; there had been little conversation; and she had been left to the bitterness of feeling that she had made a strange if not unseemly advance, of which he must think unkindly, since he had let it count with him so little.

Childishly, angrily — *she wanted him to be friends!* Why shouldn't he? He would certainly marry Betty Macdonald in time, whatever Mr. Hallin might say. Then why not put his pride away and be generous? Their future lives must of necessity touch each other, for they were bound to the same neighbourhood, the same spot of earth. She knew herself to be her father's heiress. Mellor must be hers some day; and before that day, whenever her father's illness, of which she now understood the incurable though probably tedious nature, should reach a certain stage, she must go home and take up her life there again. Why embitter such a situation? — make it more difficult for everybody concerned? Why not simply bury the past and begin again? In her restlessness she was inclined to think herself much wiser and more magnanimous than he.

Meanwhile in the Winterbourne household she was living among people to whom Aldous Raeburn was a dear and familiar companion, who admired him with all their hearts, and felt a sympathetic interest alike in his private life and his public career. Their circle,

too, was his circle; and by means of it she now saw Aldous in his relations to his equals and colleagues, whether in the Ministry or the House. The result was a number of new impressions which she half resented, as we may resent the information that some stranger will give us upon a subject we imagined ourselves better acquainted with than anybody else. The promise of Raeburn's political position struck her quick mind with a curious surprise. She could not explain it as she had so often tacitly explained his place in Brookshire — by the mere accidents of birth. After all, aristocratic as we still are, no party can now afford to choose its men by any other criterion than personal profitableness. And a man nowadays is in the long run personally profitable, far more by what he is than by what he has — so far at least has "progress" brought us.

She saw then that this quiet, strong man, with his obvious defects of temperament and manner, had already gained a remarkable degree of "consideration," using the word in its French sense, among his political contemporaries. He was beginning to be reckoned upon as a man of the future by an inner circle of persons whose word counted and carried; while yet his name was comparatively little known to the public. Marcella, indeed, had gathered her impression from the most slight and various sources — mostly from the phrases, the hints, the manner of men already themselves charged with the most difficult and responsible work of England. Above all things did she love and admire power — the power of personal capacity. It had been the secret, it was still

half the secret, of Wharton's influence with her. She saw it here under wholly different conditions and accessories. She gave it recognition with a kind of unwillingness. All the same, Raeburn took a new place in her imagination.

Then — apart from the political world and its judgments — the intimacy between him and the Winterbourne family showed her to him in many new aspects. To Lady Winterbourne, his mother's dear and close friend, he was almost a son; and nothing could be more charming than the affectionate and playful tolerance with which he treated her little oddities and weaknesses. And to all her children he was bound by the memories and kindnesses of many years. He was the godfather of Lady Ermyntrude's child; the hero and counsellor of the two sons, who were both in Parliament, and took his lead in many things; while there was no one with whom Lord Winterbourne could more comfortably discuss county or agricultural affairs. In the old days Marcella had somehow tended to regard him as a man of few friends. And in a sense it was so. He did not easily yield himself; and was often thought dull and apathetic by strangers. But here, amid these old companions, his delicacy and sweetness of disposition had full play; and although, now that Marcella was in their house, he came less often, and was less free with them than usual, she saw enough to make her wonder a little that they were all so kind and indulgent to *her*, seeing that they cared so much for him and all that affected him.

Well! she was often judged, humbled, reproached. Yet there was a certain irritation in it. Was it all

her own fault that in her brief engagement she had realised him so little? Her heart was sometimes oddly sore; her conscience full of smart; but there were moments when she was as combative as ever.

Nor had certain other experiences of this past fortnight been any more soothing to this sore craving sense of hers. It appeared very soon that nothing would have been easier for her had she chosen than to become the lion of the later season. The story of the Batton Street tragedy had, of course, got into the papers, and had been treated there with the usual adornments of the "New Journalism."

The world which knew the Raeburns or knew of them — comparatively a large world — fell with avidity on the romantic juxtaposition of names. To lose your betrothed as Aldous Raeburn had lost his, and then to come across her again in this manner and in these circumstances — there was a dramatic neatness about it to which the careless Fate that governs us too seldom attains. London discussed the story a good deal; and would have liked dearly to see and to exhibit the heroine. Mrs. Lane in particular, the hostess of the House of Commons dinner, felt that she had claims, and was one of the first to call at Lady Winterbourne's and see her guest. She soon discovered that Marcella had no intention whatever of playing the lion; and must, in fact, avoid excitement and fatigue. But she had succeeded in getting the girl to come to her once or twice of an afternoon to meet two or three people. It was better for the wounded arm that its owner should walk than drive; and Mrs. Lane lived at a convenient distance, at a house in Piccadilly, just across the Green Park.

Here then, as in James Street, Marcella had met in discreet succession a few admiring and curious persons, and had tasted some of the smaller sweets of fame. But the magnet that drew her to the Lanes' house had been no craving for notoriety; at the present moment she was totally indifferent to what perhaps constitutionally she might have liked; the attraction had been simply the occasional presence there of Harry Wharton. He excited, puzzled, angered, and commanded her more than ever. She could not keep herself away from the chance of meeting him. And Lady Winterbourne neither knew him, nor apparently wished to know him — a fact which probably tended to make Marcella obstinate.

Yet what pleasure had there been after all in these meetings! Again and again she had seen him surrounded there by pretty and fashionable women, with some of whom he was on amazingly easy terms, while with all of them he talked their language, and so far as she could see to a great extent lived their life. The contradiction of the House of Commons evening returned upon her perpetually. She thought she saw in many of his new friends a certain malicious triumph in the readiness with which the young demagogue had yielded to their baits. No doubt they were at least as much duped as he. Like Hallin, she did not believe that at bottom he was the man to let himself be held by silken bonds if it should be to his interest to break them. But, meanwhile, his bearing among these people — the claims they and their amusement made upon his time and his mind — seemed to this girl, who watched them with her dark, astonished

eyes, a kind of treachery to his place and his cause. It was something she had never dreamed of; and it roused her contempt and irritation.

Then as to herself. He had been all eagerness in his enquiries after her from Mrs. Lane; and he never saw her in the Piccadilly drawing-room that he did not pay her homage, often with a certain extravagance, a kind of appropriation, which Mrs. Lane secretly thought in bad taste, and Marcella sometimes resented. On the other hand, things jarred between them frequently. From day to day he varied. She had dreamt of a great friendship; but instead, it was hardly possible to carry on the thread of their relation from meeting to meeting with simplicity and trust. On the Terrace he had behaved, or would have behaved, if she had allowed him, as a lover. When they met again at Mrs. Lane's he would be sometimes devoted in his old paradoxical, flattering vein; sometimes, she thought, even cool. Nay, once or twice he was guilty of curious little neglects towards her, generally in the presence of some great lady or other. On one of these occasions she suddenly felt herself flushing from brow to chin at the thought — "He does not want any one to suppose for a moment that he wishes to marry me!"

It had taken Wharton some difficult hours to subdue in her the effects of that one moment's fancy. Till then it is the simple truth to say that she had never seriously considered the possibility of marrying him. When it *did* enter her mind, she saw that it had already entered his — and that he was full of doubts! The perception had given to her manner

an increasing aloofness and pride which had of late piqued Wharton into efforts from which vanity, and, indeed, something else, could not refrain, if he was to preserve his power.

So she was sitting by the window this afternoon, in a mood which had in it neither simplicity nor joy. She was conscious of a certain dull and baffled feeling — a sense of humiliation — which hurt. Moreover, the scene of sordid horror she had gone through haunted her imagination perpetually. She was unstrung, and the world weighed upon her — the pity, the ugliness, the confusion of it.

The muslin curtain beside her suddenly swelled out in a draught of air, and she put out her hand quickly to catch the French window lest it should swing to. Some one had opened the door of the room.

"*Did* I blow you out of window?" said a girl's voice; and there behind her, in a half-timid attitude, stood Betty Macdonald, a vision of white muslin, its frills and capes a little tossed by the wind, the pointed face and golden hair showing small and elf-like under the big shady hat.

"Oh, do come in!" said Marcella, shyly; "Lady Winterbourne will be in directly."

"So Panton told me," said Betty, sinking down on a high stool beside Marcella's chair, and taking off her hat; "and Panton doesn't tell *me* any stories *now* — I've trained him. I wonder how many he tells in the day? Don't you think there will be a special little corner of purgatory for London butlers? I hope Panton will get off easy!"

Then she laid her sharp chin on her tiny hand, and studied Marcella. Miss Boyce was in the light black dress that Minta approved; her pale face and delicate hands stood out from it with a sort of noble emphasis. When Betty had first heard of Marcella Boyce as the heroine of a certain story, she had thought of her as a girl one would like to meet, if only to prick her somehow for breaking the heart of a good man. Now that she saw her close she felt herself near to falling in love with her. Moreover, the incident of the fight and of Miss Boyce's share in it had thrilled a creature all susceptibility and curiosity; and the little merry thing would sit hushed, looking at the heroine of it, awed by the thought of what a girl only two years older than herself must have already seen of sin and tragedy, envying her with all her heart, and by contrast honestly despising — for the moment — that very happy and popular person, Betty Macdonald!

"Do you like being alone?" she asked Marcella, abruptly.

Marcella coloured.

"Well, I was just getting very tired of my own company," she said. "I was very glad to see you come in."

"Were you?" said Betty, joyously, with a little gleam in her pretty eyes. Then suddenly the golden head bent forward. "May I kiss you?" she said, in the wistfullest, eagerest voice.

Marcella smiled, and, laying her hand on Betty's, shyly drew her.

"That's better!" said Betty, with a long breath.

"That's the second milestone; the first was when I saw you on the Terrace. Couldn't you mark all your friendships by little white stones? I could. But the horrid thing is when you have to mark them back again! Nobody ever did that with you!"

"Because I have no friends," said Marcella, quickly; then, when Betty clapped her hands in amazement at such a speech, she added quickly with a smile, "except a few I make poultices for."

"There!" said Betty, enviously, "to think of being really *wanted* — for poultices — or anything! I never was wanted in my life! When I die they'll put on my poor little grave —

> "She's buried here — that hizzie Betty;
> She did na gude — so don't ee fret ye!

— oh, there they are!" — she ran to the window — "Lady Winterbourne and Ermyntrude. Doesn't it make you laugh to see Lady Winterbourne doing her duties? She gets into her carriage after lunch as one might mount a tumbril. I expect to hear her tell the coachman to drive to 'the scaffold at Hyde Park Corner.' She looks the unhappiest woman in England — and all the time Ermyntrude declares she likes it, and wouldn't do without her season for the world! She gives Ermyntrude a lot of trouble, but she *is* a dear — a naughty dear — and mothers are *such* a chance! Ermyntrude! *where* did you get that bonnet? You got it without me — and my feelings won't stand it!"

Lady Ermyntrude and Betty threw themselves on a sofa together, chattering and laughing. Lady Win-

terbourne came up to Marcella and enquired after her. She was still slowly drawing off her gloves, when the drawing-room door opened again.

"Tea, Panton!" said Lady Winterbourne, without turning her head, and in the tone of Lady Macbeth. But the magnificent butler took no notice.

"Lady Selina Farrell!" he announced in a firm voice.

Lady Winterbourne gave a nervous start; then, with the air of a person cut out of wood, made a slight advance, and held out a limp hand to her visitor.

"Won't you sit down?" she said.

Anybody who did not know her would have supposed that she had never seen Lady Selina before. In reality she and the Alresfords were cousins. But she did not like Lady Selina, and never took any pains to conceal it—a fact which did not in the smallest degree interfere with the younger lady's performance of her family duties.

Lady Selina found a seat with easy aplomb, put up her bejewelled fingers to draw off her veil, and smilingly prepared herself for tea. She enquired of Betty how she was enjoying herself, and of Lady Ermyntrude how her husband and baby in the country were getting on without her. The tone of this last question made the person addressed flush and draw herself up. It was put as banter, but certainly conveyed that Lady Ermyntrude was neglecting her family for the sake of dissipations. Betty meanwhile curled herself up in a corner of the sofa, letting one pretty foot swing over the other, and watching the new-comer

with a malicious eye, which instantly and gleefully perceived that Lady Selina thought her attitude ungraceful.

Marcella, of course, was greeted and condoled with — Lady Selina, however, had seen her since the tragedy — and then Lady Winterbourne, after every item of her family news, and every symptom of her own and her husband's health had been rigorously enquired into, began to attempt some feeble questions of her own — how, for instance, was Lord Alresford's gout?

Lady Selina replied that he was well, but much depressed by the political situation. No doubt Ministers had done their best, but he thought two or three foolish mistakes had been made during the session. Certain blunders ought at all hazards to have been avoided. He feared that the party and the country might have to pay dearly for them. But *he* had done his best.

Lady Winterbourne, whose eldest son was a junior whip, had been the recipient, since the advent of the new Cabinet, of so much rejoicing over the final exclusion of "that vain old idiot, Alresford," from any further chances of muddling a public department, that Lady Selina's talk made her at once nervous and irritable. She was afraid of being indiscreet; yet she longed to put her visitor down. In her odd disjointed way, too, she took a real interest in politics. Her craving idealist nature — mated with a cheery sportsman husband who laughed at her, yet had made her happy — was always trying to reconcile the ends of eternal justice with the measures of the Tory party. It was a task of Sisyphus; but she would not let it alone.

"I do not agree with you," she said with cold shyness in answer to Lady Selina's concluding laments — "I am told — our people say — we are doing very well — except that the session is likely to be dreadfully long."

Lady Selina raised both her eyebrows and her shoulders.

"*Dear* Lady Winterbourne! you really mean it?" she said with the indulgent incredulity one shows to the simple-minded — "But just think! The session will go on, every one says, till *quite* the end of September. Isn't that enough of itself to make a party discontented? *All* our big measures are in dreadful arrears. And my father believes so *much* of the friction might have been avoided. He is all in favour of doing more for Labour. He thinks these Labour men might have been easily propitiated without anything revolutionary. It's no good supposing that these poor starving people will wait for ever!"

"Oh!" said Lady Winterbourne, and sat staring at her visitor. To those who knew its author well, the monosyllable could not have been more expressive. Lady Winterbourne's sense of humour had no voice, but inwardly it was busy with Lord Alresford as the "friend of the poor." *Alresford!* — the narrowest and niggardliest tyrant alive, so far as his own servants and estate were concerned. And as to Lady Selina, it was well known to the Winterbourne cousinship that she could never get a maid to stay with her six months.

"What did *you* think of Mr. Wharton's speech the other night?" said Lady Selina, bending suavely across the tea-table to Marcella.

"It was very interesting," said Marcella, stiffly — perfectly conscious that the name had pricked the attention of everybody in the room, and angry with her cheeks for reddening.

"Wasn't it?" said Lady Selina, heartily. "You can't *do* those things, of course! But you should show every sympathy to the clever enthusiastic young men — the men like that — shouldn't you? That's what my father says. He says we've got to win them. We've got somehow to make them feel us their friends — or we shall *all* go to ruin! They have the voting power — and we are the party of education, of refinement. If we can only lead that kind of man to see the essential justice of our cause — and at the same time give them our help — in reason — show them we want to be their friends — wouldn't it be best? I don't know whether I put it rightly — you know so much about these things! But we can't undo '67 — can we? We must get round it somehow — mustn't we? And my father thinks Ministers so unwise! But perhaps" — and Lady Selina drew herself back with a more gracious smile than ever — "I ought not to be saying these things to you — of course I know you *used* to think us Conservatives very bad people — but Mr. Wharton tells me, perhaps you don't think *quite* so hardly of us as you used?"

Lady Selina's head in its Paris bonnet fell to one side in a gentle interrogative sort of way.

Something roused in Marcella.

"Our cause?" she repeated, while the dark eye dilated — "I wonder what you mean?"

"Well, I mean —" said Lady Selina, seeking for

the harmless word, in the face of this unknown explosive-looking girl — "I mean, of course, the cause of the educated — of the people who have made the country."

"I think," said Marcella, quietly, "you mean the cause of the rich, don't you?"

"Marcella!" cried Lady Winterbourne, catching at the tone rather than words — "I thought you didn't feel like that any more — not about the distance between the poor and the rich — and our tyranny — and its being hopeless — and the poor always hating us — I thought you changed."

And forgetting Lady Selina, remembering only the old talks at Mellor, Lady Winterbourne bent forward and laid an appealing hand on Marcella's arm.

Marcella turned to her with an odd look.

"If you only knew," she said, "how much more possible it is to think well of the rich, when you are living amongst the poor!"

"Ah! you must be at a distance from us to do us justice?" enquired Lady Selina, settling her bracelets with a sarcastic lip.

"*I* must," said Marcella, looking, however, not at her, but at Lady Winterbourne. "But then, you see," — she caressed her friend's hand with a smile — "it is so easy to throw some people into opposition!"

"Dreadfully easy!" sighed Lady Winterbourne.

The flush mounted again in the girl's cheek. She hesitated, then felt driven to explanations.

"You see — oddly enough" — she pointed away for an instant to the north-east through the open window — "it's when I'm over there — among the people who

have nothing — that it does me good to remember that there are persons who live in James Street, Buckingham Gate!"

"My dear! I don't understand," said Lady Winterbourne, studying her with her most perplexed and tragic air.

"Well, isn't it simple?" said Marcella, still holding her hand and looking up at her. "It comes, I suppose, of going about all day in those streets and houses, among people who live in one room — with not a bit of prettiness anywhere — and no place to be alone in, or to rest in. I come home and *gloat* over all the beautiful dresses and houses and gardens I can think of!"

"But don't you *hate* the people that have them?" said Betty, again on her stool, chin in hand.

"No! it doesn't seem to matter to me then what kind of people they are. And I don't so much want to take from them and give to the others. I only want to be sure that the beauty, and the leisure, and the freshness are *some*where — not lost out of the world."

"How strange! — in a life like yours — that one should think so much of the *ugliness* of being poor — more than of suffering or pain," said Betty, musing.

"Well — in some moods — you do — *I* do!" said Marcella; "and it is in those moods that I feel least resentful of wealth. If I say to myself that the people who have all the beauty and the leisure are often selfish and cruel — after all they die out of their houses and their parks, and their pictures, in time, like the shell-fish out of its shell. The beauty and the grace

which they created or inherited remain. And why should one be envious of *them* personally? They have had the best chances in the world and thrown them away — are but poor animals at the end! At any rate I can't hate them — they seem to have a function — when I am moving about Drury Lane!" she added with a smile.

"But how can one help being ashamed?" said Lady Winterbourne, as her eyes wandered over her pretty room, and she felt herself driven somehow into playing devil's advocate.

"No! No!" said Marcella, eagerly, "don't be ashamed! As to the people who make beauty more beautiful — who share it and give it — I often feel as if I could say to them on my knees, Never, *never* be ashamed merely of being rich — of living with beautiful things, and having time to enjoy them! One might as well be ashamed of being strong rather than a cripple, or having two eyes rather than one!"

"Oh, but, my dear!" cried Lady Winterbourne, piteous and bewildered, "when one has all the beauty and the freedom — and other people must *die* without any —"

"Oh, I know, I *know!*" said Marcella, with a quick gesture of despair; "that's what makes the world the world. And one begins with thinking it can be changed — that it *must* and *shall* be changed! — that everybody could have wealth — could have beauty and rest, and time to think, that is to say — if things were different — if one could get Socialism — if one could beat down the capitalist — if one could level down, and level up, till everybody had 200*l.* a year. One turns

and fingers the puzzle all day long. It seems so *near* coming right — one guesses a hundred ways in which it might be done! Then after a while one stumbles upon doubt — one begins to see that it never *will*, never *can* come right — not in any mechanical way of that sort — that *that* isn't what was meant!"

Her voice dropped drearily. Betty Macdonald gazed at her with a girl's nascent adoration. Lady Winterbourne was looking puzzled and unhappy, but absorbed like Betty in Marcella. Lady Selina, studying the three with smiling composure, was putting on her veil, with the most careful attention to fringe and hairpins. As for Ermyntrude, she was no longer on the sofa; she had risen noiselessly, finger on lip, almost at the beginning of Marcella's talk, to greet a visitor. She and he were standing at the back of the room, in the opening of the conservatory, unnoticed by any of the group in the bow window.

"Don't you think," said Lady Selina, airily, her white fingers still busy with her bonnet, "that it would be a very good thing to send all the Radicals — the well-to-do Radicals I mean — to live among the poor? It seems to teach people such extremely useful things!"

Marcella straightened herself as though some one had touched her impertinently. She looked round quickly.

"I wonder what you suppose it teaches?"

"Well," said Lady Selina, a little taken aback and hesitating; "well! I suppose it teaches a person to be content — and not to cry for the moon!"

"You *think*," said Marcella, slowly, "that to live

among the poor can teach any one — any one that's *human* — to be *content!*"

Her manner had the unconscious intensity of emphasis, the dramatic force that came to her from another blood than ours. Another woman could hardly have fallen into such a tone without affectation — without pose. At this moment certainly Betty, who was watching her, acquitted her of either, and warmly thought her a magnificent creature.

Lady Selina's feeling simply was that she had been roughly addressed by her social inferior. She drew herself up.

"As I understand you," she said stiffly, "you yourself confessed that to live with poverty had led you to think more reasonably of wealth."

Suddenly a movement of Lady Ermyntrude's made the speaker turn her head. She saw the pair at the end of the room, looked astonished, then smiled.

"Why, Mr. Raeburn! where have you been hiding yourself during this great discussion? Most consoling, wasn't it — on the whole — to us West End people?"

She threw back a keen glance at Marcella. Lady Ermyntrude and Raeburn came forward.

"I made him be quiet," said Ermyntrude, not looking, however, quite at her ease; "it would have been a shame to interrupt."

"I think so, indeed!" said Lady Selina, with emphasis. "Good-bye, dear Lady Winterbourne; good-bye, Miss Boyce! You have comforted me very much! Of *course* one is sorry for the poor; but it is a great thing to hear from anybody who knows as much about

it as *you* do, that — after all — it is no crime — to possess a little!"

She stood smiling, looking from the girl to the man — then, escorted by Raeburn in his very stiffest manner, she swept out of the room.

When Aldous came back, with a somewhat slow and hesitating step, he approached Marcella, who was standing silent by the window, and asked after the lame arm. He was sorry, he said, to see that it was still in its sling. His tone was a little abrupt. Only Lady Winterbourne saw the quick nervousness of the eyes.

"Oh! thank you," said Marcella, coldly, "I shall get back to work next week."

She stooped and took up her book.

"I must please go and write some letters," she said, in answer to Lady Winterbourne's flurried look.

And she walked away. Betty and Lady Ermyntrude also went to take off their things.

"Aldous!" said Lady Winterbourne, holding out her hand to him.

He took it, glanced unwillingly at her wistful, agitated face, pressed the hand, and let it go.

"Isn't it sad," said his old friend, unable to help herself, "to see her battling like this with life — with thought — all alone? Isn't it sad, Aldous?"

"Yes," he said. Then, after a pause, "Why *doesn't* she go home? My patience gives out when I think of Mrs. Boyce."

"Oh! it isn't Mrs. Boyce's fault," said Lady Winterbourne, hopelessly. "And I don't know why one should be sorry for her particularly — why one should

want her to change her life again. She does it splendidly. Only I never, *never* feel that she is a bit happy in it."

It was Hallin's cry over again.

He said nothing for a moment; then he forced a smile.

"Well! neither you nor I can help it, can we?" he said. The grey eyes looked at her steadily — bitterly. Lady Winterbourne, with the sensation of one who, looking for softness, has lit on granite, changed the subject.

Meanwhile, Marcella upstairs was walking restlessly up and down. She could hardly keep herself from rushing off — back to Brown's Buildings at once. *He* in the room while she was saying those things! Lady Selina's words burnt in her ears. Her morbid, irritable sense was all one vibration of pride and revolt. Apology — appeal — under the neatest comedy guise! Of course! — now that Lord Maxwell was dying, and the ill-used suitor was so much the nearer to his earldom. A foolish girl had repented her of her folly — was anxious to make those concerned understand — what more simple?

Her nerves were strained and out of gear. Tears came in a proud, passionate gush; and she must needs allow herself the relief of them.

Meanwhile, Lady Selina had gone home full of new and uncomfortable feelings. She could not get Marcella Boyce out of her head — neither as she had just seen her, under the wing of "that foolish woman, Madeleine Winterbourne," nor as she had seen her

first, on the terrace with Harry Wharton. It did not please Lady Selina to feel herself in any way eclipsed or even rivalled by such an unimportant person as this strange and ridiculous girl. Yet it crossed her mind with a stab, as she lay resting on the sofa in her little sitting-room before dinner, that never in all her thirty-five years had any human being looked into *her* face with the same alternations of eagerness and satisfied pleasure she had seen on Harry Wharton's, as he and Miss Boyce strolled the terrace together — nor even with such a look as that silly baby Betty Macdonald had put on, as she sat on the stool at the heroine's feet.

There was to be a small dinner-party at Alresford House that night. Wharton was to be among the guests. He was fast becoming one of the *habitués* of the house, and would often stay behind to talk to Lady Selina when the guests were gone, and Lord Alresford was dozing peacefully in a deep arm-chair.

Lady Selina lay still in the evening light, and let her mind, which worked with extraordinary shrewdness and force in the grooves congenial to it, run over some possibilities of the future.

She was interrupted by the entrance of her maid, who, with the quickened breath and heightened colour she could not repress when speaking to her formidable mistress, told her that one of the younger housemaids was very ill. Lady Selina enquired, found that the doctor who always attended the servants had been sent for, and thought that the illness *might* turn to rheumatic fever.

"Oh, send her off to the hospital at once!" said

Lady Selina. "Let Mrs. Stewart see Dr. Briggs first thing in the morning, and make arrangements. You understand?"

The girl hesitated, and the candles she was lighting showed that she had been crying.

"If your ladyship would but let her stay," she said timidly, "we'd all take our turns at nursing her. She comes from Ireland, perhaps you'll remember, my lady. She's no friends in London, and she's frightened to death of going to the hospital."

"That's nonsense!" said Lady Selina, sternly. "Do you think I can have all the work of the house put out because some one is ill? She might die even — one never knows. Just tell Mrs. Stewart to arrange with her about her wages, and to look out for somebody else at once."

The girl's mouth set sullenly as she went about her work — put out the shining satin dress, the jewels, the hairpins, the curling-irons, the various powders and cosmetics that were wanted for Lady Selina's toilette, and all the time there was ringing in her ears the piteous cry of a little Irish girl, clinging like a child to her only friend: "O Marie! dear Marie! do get her to let me stay — I'll do everything the doctor tells me — I'll make *haste* and get well — I'll give no trouble. And it's all along of the work — and the damp up in these rooms — the doctor said so."

An hour later Lady Selina was in the stately drawing-room of Alresford House, receiving her guests. She was out of sorts and temper, and though Wharton arrived in due time, and she had the prospect to enliven her during dinner — when he was of necessity parted

from her by people of higher rank — of a *tête-à-tête* with him before the evening was over, the dinner went heavily. The Duke on her right hand, and the Dean on her left, were equally distasteful to her. Neither food nor wine had savour; and once, when in an interval of talk she caught sight of her father's face and form at the further end, growing more vacant and decrepit week by week, she was seized with a sudden angry pang of revolt and repulsion. Her father wearied and disgusted her. Life was often triste and dull in the great house. Yet, when the old man should have found his grave, she would be a much smaller person than she was now, and the days would be so much the more tedious.

Wharton, too, showed less than his usual animation. She said to herself at dinner that he had the face of a man in want of sleep. His young brilliant look was somewhat tarnished, and there was worry in the restless eye. And, indeed, she knew that things had not been going so favourably for him in the House of late — that the stubborn opposition of the little group of men led by Wilkins was still hindering that concentration of the party and definition of his own foremost place in it which had looked so close and probable a few weeks before. She supposed he had been exhausting himself, too, over that shocking Midland strike. The *Clarion* had been throwing itself into the battle of the men with a monstrous violence, for which she had several times reproached him.

When all the guests had gone but Wharton, and Lord Alresford, duly placed for the sake of propriety in his accustomed chair, was safely asleep, Lady Selina asked what was the matter.

"Oh, the usual thing!" he said, as he leant against the mantelpiece beside her. "The world's a poor place, and my doll's stuffed with sawdust. Did you ever know any doll that wasn't?"

She looked up at him a moment without speaking.

"Which means," she said, "that you can't get your way in the House?"

"No," said Wharton, meditatively, looking down at his boots. "No — not yet."

"You think you will get it some day?"

He raised his eyes.

"Oh yes!" he said; "oh dear, yes! — some day."

She laughed.

"You had better come over to us."

"Well, there is always that to think of, isn't there? You can't deny you want all the new blood you can get!"

"If you only understood your moment and your chance," she said quickly, "you would make the opportunity and do it at once."

He looked at her aggressively.

"How easy it comes to you Tories to rat!" he said.

"Thank you! it only means that we are the party of common sense. Well, I have been talking to your Miss Boyce."

He started.

"Where?"

"At Lady Winterbourne's. Aldous Raeburn was there. Your beautiful Socialist was very interesting — and rather surprising. She talked of the advantages of wealth; said she had been converted — by living among the poor — had changed her mind, in fact, on many things. We were all much edified —

including Mr. Raeburn. How long do you suppose that business will remain 'off'? To my mind I never saw a young woman more eager to undo a mistake." Then she added slowly, "The accounts of Lord Maxwell get more and more unsatisfactory."

Wharton stared at her with sparkling eyes. "How little you know her!" he said, not without a tone of contempt.

"Oh! very well," said Lady Selina, with the slightest shrug of her white shoulders.

He turned to the mantelpiece and began to play with some ornaments upon it.

"Tell me what she said," he enquired presently.

Lady Selina gave her own account of the conversation. Wharton recovered himself.

"Dear me!" he said, when she stopped. "Yes — well — we may see another act. Who knows? Well, good-night, Lady Selina."

She gave him her hand with her usual aristocrat's passivity, and he went. But it was late indeed that night before she ceased to speculate on what the real effect of her words had been upon him.

As for Wharton, on his walk home he thought of Marcella Boyce and of Raeburn with a certain fever of jealous vanity which was coming, he told himself, dangerously near to passion. He did not believe Lady Selina, but nevertheless he felt that her news might drive him into rash steps he could ill afford, and had indeed been doing his best to avoid. Meanwhile it was clear to him that the mistress of Alresford House had taken an envious dislike to Marcella. How plain she had looked to-night in spite of her gorgeous dress! and how intolerable Lord Alresford grew!

CHAPTER XII.

But what right had Wharton to be thinking of such irrelevant matters as women and love-making at all? He had spoken of public worries to Lady Selina. In reality his public prospects in themselves were, if anything, improved. It was his private affairs that were rushing fast on catastrophe, and threatening to drag the rest with them.

He had never been so hard pressed for money in his life. In the first place his gambling debts had mounted up prodigiously of late. His friends were tolerant and easy-going. But the more tolerant they were the more he was bound to frequent them. And his luck for some time had been monotonously bad. Before long these debts must be paid, and some of them — to a figure he shrank from dwelling upon — were already urgent.

Then as to the *Clarion*, it became every week a heavier burden. The expenses of it were enormous; the returns totally inadequate. Advertisements were falling off steadily; and whether the working cost were cut down, or whether a new and good man like Lóuis Craven, whose letters from the strike district were being now universally read, were put on, the result financially seemed to be precisely the same. It was becoming even a desperate question how the weekly expenses were to be met; so that Wharton's usual good temper now deserted him entirely as soon as he had crossed

the *Clarion* threshold; bitterness had become the portion of the staff, and even the office boys walked in gloom.

Yet, at the same time, withdrawing from the business was almost as difficult as carrying it on. There were rumours in the air which had already seriously damaged the paper as a saleable concern. Wharton, indeed, saw no prospect whatever of selling except at ruinous loss. Meanwhile, to bring the paper to an abrupt end would have not only precipitated a number of his financial obligations; it would have been politically, a dangerous confession of failure made at a very critical moment. For what made the whole thing the more annoying was that the *Clarion* had never been so important politically, never so much read by the persons on whom Wharton's parliamentary future depended, as it was at this moment. The advocacy of the Damesley strike had been so far a stroke of business for Wharton as a Labour Member.

It was now the seventh week of the strike, and Wharton's "leaders," Craven's letters from the seat of war, and the *Clarion* strike fund, which articles and letters had called into existence, were as vigorous as ever. The struggle itself had fallen into two chapters. In the first the metal-workers concerned, both men and women, had stood out for the old wages unconditionally and had stoutly rejected all idea of arbitration. At the end of three or four weeks, however, when grave suffering had declared itself among an already half-starved population, the workers had consented to take part in the appointment of a board of conciliation. This board, including the workmen's

delegates, overawed by the facts of foreign competition as they were disclosed by the masters, recommended terms which would have amounted to a victory for the employers.

The award was no sooner known in the district than the passionate indignation of the great majority of the workers knew no bounds. Meetings were held everywhere; the men's delegates at the board were thrown over, and Craven, who with his new wife was travelling incessantly over the whole strike area, wrote a letter to the *Clarion* on the award which stated the men's case with extreme ability, was immediately backed up by Wharton in a tremendous "leader," and was received among the strikers with tears almost of gratitude and enthusiasm.

Since then all negotiations had been broken off. The *Clarion* had gone steadily against the masters, against the award, against further arbitration. The theory of the "living wage," of which more recent days have heard so much, was preached in other terms, but with equal vigour; and the columns of the *Clarion* bore witness day by day in the long lists of subscriptions to the strike fund, to the effects of its eloquence on the hearts and pockets of Englishmen.

Meanwhile there were strange rumours abroad. It was said that the trade was really on the eve of a complete and striking revolution in its whole conditions — could this labour war be only cleared out of the way. The smaller employers had been for long on the verge of ruin; and the larger men, so report had it, were scheming a syndicate on the American

plan to embrace the whole industry, cut down the costs of production, and regulate the output.

But for this large capital would be wanted. Could capital be got? The state of things in the trade, according to the employers, had been deplorable for years; a large part of the market had been definitely forfeited, so they declared, for good, to Germany and Belgium. It would take years before even a powerful syndicate could work itself into a thoroughly sound condition. Let the men accept the award of the conciliation board; let there be some stable and reasonable prospect of peace between masters and men, say, for a couple of years; and a certain group of bankers would come forward; and all would be well. The men under the syndicate would in time get more than their old wage. *But the award first;* otherwise the plan dropped, and the industry must go its own way to perdition.

"'Will you walk into my parlour?'" said Wharton, scornfully, to the young Conservative member who, with a purpose, was explaining these things to him in the library of the House of Commons, "the merest trap! and, of course, the men will see it so. Who is to guarantee them even the carrying through, much less the success, of your precious syndicate? And, in return for your misty millennium two years hence, the men are to join at once in putting the employers in a stronger position than ever? Thank you! The 'rent of ability' in the present state of things is, no doubt, large. But in this particular case the *Clarion* will go on doing its best — I promise you — to nibble some of it away!"

The Conservative member rose in indignation.

"I should be sorry to have as many starving people on my conscience as you'll have before long!" he said as he took up his papers.

At that moment Denny's rotund and square-headed figure passed along the corridor, to which the library door stood open.

"Well, if I thrive upon it as well as Denny does, I shall do!" returned Wharton, with his usual caustic good-humour, as his companion departed.

And it delighted him to think as he walked home that Denny, who had again of late made himself particularly obnoxious in the House of Commons, on two or three occasions, to the owner of the *Clarion*, had probably instigated the quasi-overtures he had just rejected, and must be by now aware of their result.

Then he sent for Craven to come and confer with him.

Craven accordingly came up from the Midlands, pale, thin, and exhausted, with the exertions and emotions of seven weeks' incessant labour. Yet personally Wharton found him, as before, dry and unsympathetic; and disliked him, and his cool, ambiguous manner, more than ever. As to the strike, however, they came to a complete understanding. The *Clarion*, or rather the *Clarion* fund, which was doing better and better, held the key of the whole situation. If that fund could be maintained, the men could hold out. In view of the possible formation of the syndicate, Craven denounced the award with more fierceness than ever, maintaining the redoubled importance of securing the men's terms before the syndicate was launched. Wharton promised him with glee that he should be supported to the bitter end.

If, that is to say — a proviso he did not discuss with Craven — the *Clarion* itself could be kept going. In August a large sum, obtained two years before on the security of new "plant," would fall due. The time for repayment had already been extended; and Wharton had ascertained that no further extension was possible.

Well! bankruptcy would be a piquant interlude in his various social and political enterprises! How was it to be avoided? He had by now plenty of rich friends in the City or elsewhere, but none, as he finally decided, likely to be useful to him at the present moment. For the amount of money that he required was large — larger, indeed, than he cared to verify with any strictness, and the security that he could offer, almost nil.

As to friends in the City, indeed, the only excursion of a business kind that he had made into those regions since his election was now adding seriously to his anxieties — might very well turn out, unless the matter were skilfully managed, to be one of the blackest spots on his horizon.

In the early days of his parliamentary life, when, again, mostly for the *Clarion's* sake, money happened to be much wanted, he had become director of what promised to be an important company, through the interest and good nature of a new and rich acquaintance, who had taken a liking to the young member. The company had been largely "boomed," and there had been some very profitable dealing in the original shares. Wharton had made two or three thousand pounds, and contributed both point and finish to some of the early prospectuses.

Then, after six months, he had withdrawn from the Board, under apprehensions that had been gradually realised with alarming accuracy. Things, indeed, had been going very wrong indeed; there were a number of small investors; and the annual meeting of the company, to be held now in some ten days, promised a storm. Wharton discovered, partly to his own amazement, for he was a man who quickly forgot, that during his directorate he had devised or sanctioned matters that were not at all likely to commend themselves to the shareholders, supposing the past were really sifted. The ill-luck of it was truly stupendous; for on the whole he had kept himself financially very clean since he had become a member; having all through a jealous eye to his political success.

As to the political situation, nothing could be at once more promising or more anxious!

An important meeting of the whole Labour group had been fixed for August 10, by which time it was expected that a great measure concerning Labour would be returned from the House of Lords with highly disputable amendments. The last six weeks of the session would be in many ways more critical for Labour than its earlier months had been; and it would be proposed by Bennett, at the meeting on the 10th, to appoint a general chairman of the party, in view of a campaign which would fill the remainder of the session and strenuously occupy the recess.

That Bennett would propose the name of the member for West Brookshire was perfectly well known to Wharton and his friends. That the nomination would

meet with the warmest hostility from Wilkins and a small group of followers was also accurately forecast.

To this day, then, Wharton looked forward as to the crisis of his parliamentary fortunes. All his chances, financial or social, must now be calculated with reference to it. Every power, whether of combat or finesse, that he commanded must be brought to bear upon the issue.

What was, however, most remarkable in the man and the situation at the moment was that, through all these gathering necessities, he was by no means continuously anxious or troubled in his mind. During these days of July he gave himself, indeed, whenever he could, to a fatalist oblivion of the annoyances of life, coupled with a passionate pursuit of all those interests where his chances were still good and the omens still with him.

Especially — during the intervals of ambition, intrigue, journalism, and unsuccessful attempts to raise money — had he meditated the beauty of Marcella Boyce and the chances and difficulties of his relation to her. As he saw her less, he thought of her more, instinctively looking to her for the pleasure and distraction that life was temporarily denying him elsewhere.

At the same time, curiously enough, the stress of his financial position was reflected even in what, to himself, at any rate, he was boldly beginning to call his "passion" for her. It had come to his knowledge that Mr. Boyce had during the past year succeeded beyond all expectation in clearing the Mellor estate. He had made skilful use of a railway lately opened

on the edge of his property; had sold building land in the neighbourhood of a small country town on the line, within a convenient distance of London; had consolidated and improved several of his farms and relet them at higher rents; was, in fact, according to Wharton's local informant, in a fair way to be some day, if he lived, quite as prosperous as his grandfather, in spite of old scandals and invalidism. Wharton knew, or thought he knew, that he would not live, and that Marcella would be his heiress. The prospect was not perhaps brilliant, but it was something; it affected the outlook.

Although, however, this consideration counted, it was, to do him justice, *Marcella*, the creature herself, that he desired. But for her presence in his life he would probably have gone heiress-hunting with the least possible delay. As it was, his growing determination to win her, together with his advocacy of the Damesley workers — amply sufficed, during the days that followed his evening talk with Lady Selina, to maintain his own illusions about himself and so to keep up the zest of life.

Yes! — to master and breathe passion into Marcella Boyce, might safely be reckoned on, he thought, to hurry a man's blood. And after it had gone so far between them — after he had satisfied himself that her fancy, her temper, her heart, were all more or less occupied with him — was he to see her tamely recovered by Aldous Raeburn — by the man whose advancing parliamentary position was now adding fresh offence to the old grievance and dislike? No! not without a dash — a throw for it!

For a while, after Lady Selina's confidences, jealous annoyance, together with a certain reckless state of nerves, turned him almost into the pining lover. For he could not see Marcella. She came no more to Mrs. Lane; and the house in James Street was not open to him. He perfectly understood that the Winterbournes did not want to know him.

At last Mrs. Lane, a shrewd little woman with a half contemptuous liking for Wharton, let him know — on the strength of a chance meeting with Lady Ermyntrude — that the Winterbournes would be at the Masterton party on the 26th. They had persuaded Miss Boyce to stay for it, and she would go back to her work the Monday after. Wharton carelessly replied that he did not know whether he would be able to put in an appearance at the Mastertons'. He might be going out of town.

Mrs. Lane looked at him and said, "Oh, really!" with a little laugh.

Lady Masterton was the wife of the Colonial Secretary, and her grand mansion in Grosvenor Square was the principal rival to Alresford House in the hospitalities of the party. Her reception on July 25 was to be the last considerable event of a protracted but now dying season. Marcella, detained in James Street day after day against her will by the weakness of the injured arm and the counsels of her doctor, had at last extracted permission to go back to work on the 27th; and to please Betty Macdonald she had promised to go with the Winterbournes to the Masterton party on the Saturday. Betty's devotion,

shyly as she had opened her proud heart to it, had begun to mean a good deal to her. There was balm in it for many a wounded feeling; and, besides, there was the constant, half eager, half painful interest of watching Betty's free and childish ways with Aldous Raeburn, and of speculating upon what would ultimately come out of them.

So, when Betty first demanded to know what she was going to wear, and then pouted over the dress shown her, Marcella submitted humbly to being "freshened up" at the hands of Lady Ermyntrude's maid, bought what Betty told her, and stood still while Betty, who had a genius for such things, chattered, and draped, and suggested.

"I wouldn't make you fashionable for the world!" cried Betty, with a mouthful of pins, laying down masterly folds of lace and chiffon the while over the white satin with which Marcella had provided her. "What was it Worth said to me the other day? — 'Ce qu'on porte, Mademoiselle? O pas grand'chose! — presque pas de corsage, et pas du tout de manches!' — No, that kind of thing wouldn't suit you. But *distinguished* you shall be, if I sit up all night to think it out!"

In the end Betty was satisfied, and could hardly be prevented from hugging Marcella there and then, out of sheer delight in her own handiwork, when at last the party emerged from the cloak-room into the Mastertons' crowded hall. Marcella too felt pleasure in the reflections of herself as they passed up the lavishly bemirrored staircase. The chatter about dress in which she had been living for some days had

amused and distracted her; for there were great feminine potentialities in her; though for eighteen months she had scarcely given what she wore a thought, and in her pre-nursing days had been wont to waver between a kind of proud neglect, which implied the secret consciousness of beauty, and an occasional passionate desire to look well. So that she played her part to-night very fairly; pinched Betty's arm to silence the elf's tongue; and held herself up as she was told, that Betty's handiwork might look its best. But inwardly the girl's mood was very tired and flat. She was pining for her work; pining even for Minta Hurd's peevish look, and the children to whom she was so easily an earthly providence.

In spite of the gradual emptying of London, Lady Masterton's rooms were very full. Marcella found acquaintances. Many of the people whom she had met at Mrs. Lane's, the two Cabinet Ministers of the House of Commons dinner, Mr. Lane himself — all were glad or eager to recall themselves to her as she stood by Lady Winterbourne, or made her way half absently through the press. She talked, without shyness — she had never been shy, and was perhaps nearer now to knowing what it might mean than she had been as a schoolgirl — but without heart; her black eye wandering meanwhile, as though in quest. There was a gay sprinkling of uniforms in the crowd, for the Speaker was holding a *levée*, and as it grew late his guests began to set towards Lady Masterton. Betty, who had been turning up her nose at the men she had so far smiled upon, all of whom she declared were either bald or seventy, was a little propitiated

by the uniforms; otherwise, she pronounced the party very dull.

"Well, upon my word!" she cried suddenly, in a tone that made Marcella turn upon her. The child was looking very red and very upright — was using her fan with great vehemence, and Frank Leven was humbly holding out his hand to her.

"I don't like being startled," said Betty, pettishly. "Yes, you *did* startle me — you did — you did! And then you begin to contradict before I've said a word! I'm sure you've been contradicting all the way upstairs — and why don't you say 'How do you do?' to Miss Boyce?"

Frank, looking very happy, but very nervous, paid his respects rather bashfully to Marcella — she laughed to see how Betty's presence subdued him — and then gave himself up wholly to Betty's tender mercies.

Marcella observed them with an eager interest she could not wholly explain to herself. It was clear that all thought of anything or anybody else had vanished for Frank Leven at the sight of Betty. Marcella guessed, indeed knew, that they had not met for some little time; and she was touched by the agitation and happiness on the boy's handsome face. But Betty? what was the secret of her kittenish, teasing ways — or was there any secret? She held her little head very high and chattered very fast — but it was not the same chatter that she gave to Marcella, nor, so far as Marcella could judge, to Aldous Raeburn. New elements of character came out in it. It was self-confident, wilful, imperious. Frank was never allowed

to have an opinion; was laughed at before his words were out of his mouth; was generally heckled, played with, and shaken in a way which seemed alternately to enrage and enchant him. In the case of most girls, such a manner would have meant encouragement; but, as it was Betty, no one could be sure. The little thing was a great puzzle to Marcella, who had found unexpected reserves in her. She might talk of her love affairs to Aldous Raeburn; she had done nothing of the sort with her new friend. And in such matters Marcella herself was far more reserved than most modern women.

"Betty!" cried Lady Winterbourne, "I am going on into the next room."

Then in a lower tone she said helplessly to Marcella:

"Do make her come on!"

Marcella perceived that her old friend was in a fidget. Stooping her tall head, she said with a smile:

"But look how she is amusing herself!"

"My dear! — that's just it! If you only knew how her mother — tiresome woman — has talked to me! And the young man has behaved so beautifully till now — has given neither Ermyntrude nor me any trouble."

Was that why Betty was leading him such a life? Marcella wondered, — then suddenly — was seized with a sick distaste for the whole scene — for Betty's love affairs — for her own interest in them — for her own self and personality above all. Her great black eyes gazed straight before them, unseeing, over the crowd, the diamonds, the lights; her whole being

gave itself to a quick, blind wrestle with some vague overmastering pain, some despair of life and joy to which she could give no name.

She was roused by Betty's voice:

"Mr. Raeburn! will *you* tell me who people are? Mr. Leven's no more use than my fan. Just imagine — I asked him who that lady in the tiara is — and he vows he doesn't know! Why, it just seems that when you go to Oxford, you leave the wits you had before, behind! And then — of course" — Betty affected a delicate hesitation — "there's the difficulty of being quite sure that you'll ever get any new ones! — But there — look! — I'm in despair! — she's vanished — and I shall *never* know!"

"One moment!" said Raeburn, smiling, "and I will take you in pursuit. She has only gone into the tea-room."

His hand touched Marcella's.

"Just a *little* better," he said, with a sudden change of look, in answer to Lady Winterbourne's question. "The account to-night is certainly brighter. They begged me not to come, or I should have been off some days ago. And next week, I am thankful to say, they will be home."

Why should she be standing there, so inhumanly still and silent? — Marcella asked herself. Why not take courage again — join in — talk — show sympathy? But the words died on her lips. After to-night — thank heaven! — she need hardly see him again.

He asked after herself as usual. Then, just as he was turning away with Betty, he came back to her, unexpectedly.

"I should like to tell you about Hallin," he said gently. "His sister writes to me that she is happier about him, and that she hopes to be able to keep him away another fortnight. They are at Keswick."

For an instant there was pleasure in the implication of common ground, a common interest — here if nowhere else. Then the pleasure was lost in the smart of her own strange lack of self-government as she made a rather stupid and awkward reply.

Raeburn's eyes rested on her for a moment. There was in them a flash of involuntary expression, which she did not notice — for she had turned away — which no one saw — except Betty. Then the child followed him to the tea-room, a little pale and pensive.

Marcella looked after them.

In the midst of the uproar about her, the babel of talk fighting against the Hungarian band, which was playing its wildest and loudest in the tea-room, she was overcome by a sudden rush of memory. Her eyes were tracing the passage of those two figures through the crowd; the man in his black court suit, stooping his refined and grizzled head to the girl beside him, or turning every now and then to greet an acquaintance, with the manner — cordial and pleasant, yet never quite gay even when he smiled — that she, Marcella, had begun to notice of late as a new thing; the girl lifting her small face to him, the gold of her hair showing against his velvet sleeve. But the inward sense was busy with a number of other impressions, past, and, as it now seemed, incredible.

The little scene when Aldous had given her the pearls, returned so long ago — why! she could see the

fire blazing in the Stone Parlour, feel his arm about her! — the drive home after the Gairsley meeting — that poignant moment in his sitting-room the night of the ball — his face, his anxious, tender face, as she came down the wide stairs of the Court towards him on that terrible evening when she pleaded with him and his grandfather in vain: — had these things, incidents, relations, been ever a real part of the living world? Impossible! Why, there he was — not ten yards from her — and yet more irrevocably separate from her than if the Sahara stretched between them. The note of cold distance in his courteous manner put her further from him than the merest stranger.

Marcella felt a sudden terror rush through her as she blindly followed Lady Winterbourne; her limbs trembled under her; she took advantage of a conversation between her companion and the master of the house to sink down for a moment on a settee, where she felt out of sight and notice.

What was this intolerable sense of loss and folly, this smarting emptiness, this rage with herself and her life? She only knew that whereas the touch, the eye of Aldous Raeburn had neither compelled nor thrilled her, so long as she possessed his whole heart and life — *now* — that she had no right to either look or caress; now that he had ceased even to regard her as a friend, and was already perhaps making up that loyal and serious mind of his to ask from another woman the happiness she had denied him; now, when it was absurdly too late, she could —

Could what? Passionate, wilful creature that she was! — with that breath of something wild and incal-

culable surging through the inmost places of the soul, she went through a moment of suffering as she sat pale and erect in her corner — brushed against by silks and satins, chattered across by this person and that — such as seemed to bruise all the remaining joy and ease out of life.

But only a moment! Flesh and blood rebelled. She sprang up from her seat; told herself that she was mad or ill; caught sight of Mr. Lane coming towards them, and did her best by smile and greeting to attract him to her.

"You look very white, my dear Miss Boyce," said that cheerful and fatherly person. "Is it that tiresome arm still? Now, don't please go and be a heroine any more!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MEANWHILE, in the tea-room, Betty was daintily sipping her claret-cup, while Aldous stood by her.

"No," said Betty, calmly, looking straight at the lady in the tiara who was standing by the buffet, "she's not beautiful, and I've torn my dress running after her. There's only one beautiful person here to-night!"

Aldous found her a seat, and took one himself beside her, in a corner out of the press. But he did not answer her remark.

"Don't you think so, Mr. Aldous?" said Betty, persisting, but with a little flutter of the pulse.

"You mean Miss Boyce?" he said quietly, as he turned to her.

"Of course!" cried Betty, with a sparkle in her charming eyes; "what *is* it in her face? It excites me to be near her. One feels that she will just have lived *twice* as much as the rest of us by the time she comes to the end. You don't mind my talking of her, Mr. Aldous?"

There was an instant's silence on his part. Then he said in a constrained voice, looking away from his companion, "I don't *mind* it, but I am not going to pretend to you that I find it easy to talk of her."

"It would be a shame of you to pretend anything," said Betty, fervently, "after all I've told you! I con-

fessed all my scrapes to you, turned out all my rubbish bag of a heart — well, nearly all" — she checked herself with a sudden flush — "And you've been as kind to me as any big brother could be. But you're dreadfully lofty, Mr. Aldous! You keep yourself to yourself. I don't think it's fair!"

Aldous laughed.

"My dear Miss Betty, haven't you found out by now that I am a good listener and a bad talker? I don't talk of myself or" — he hesitated — "the things that have mattered most to me — because, in the first place, it doesn't come easy to me — and, in the next, I can't, you see, discuss my own concerns without discussing other people's."

"Oh, good gracious!" said Betty, "what you must have been thinking about me! I declare I'll never tell you anything again!" — and, beating her tiny foot upon the ground, she sat, scarlet, looking down at it.

Aldous made all the smiling excuses he could muster. He had found Betty a most beguiling and attaching little companion, both at the Court in the Easter recess, and during the Italian journey. Her total lack of reserve, or what appeared so, had been first an amazement to him, and then a positive pleasure and entertainment. To make a friend of him — difficult and scrupulous as he was, and now more than ever — a woman must be at the cost of most of the advances. But, after the first evening with him, Betty had made them in profusion, without the smallest demur, though perfectly well aware of her mother's ambitions. There was a tie of cousin-

ship between them, and a considerable difference of age. Betty had decided at once that a mother was a dear old goose, and that great friends she and Aldous Raeburn should be — and, in a sense, great friends they were.

Aldous was still propitiating her, when Lady Winterbourne came into the tea-room, followed by Marcella. The elder lady threw a hurried and not very happy glance at the pair in the corner. Marcella appeared to be in animated talk with a young journalist whom Raeburn knew, and did not look their way.

"Just *one* thing!" said Betty, bending forward and speaking eagerly in Aldous's ear. "It was all a mistake — wasn't it? Now I know her I feel sure it was. You don't — you don't — really think badly of her?"

Aldous heard her unwillingly. He was looking away from her towards the buffet, when she saw a change in the eyes — a tightening of the lip — a something keen and hostile in the whole face.

"Perhaps Miss Boyce will be less of a riddle to all of us before long!" he said hastily, as though the words escaped him. "Shall we get out of this very uncomfortable corner?"

Betty looked where he had looked, and saw a young man greeting Marcella with a manner so emphatic and intimate, that the journalist had instantly moved out of his way. The young man had a noticeable pile of fair curls above a very white and rounded forehead.

"Who is that talking to Miss Boyce?" she asked of Aldous; "I have seen him, but I can't remember the name."

"That is Mr. Wharton, the member for one of our divisions," said Aldous, as he rose from his chair.

Betty gave a little start, and her brow puckered into a frown. As she too rose, she said resentfully to Aldous:

"Well, you *have* snubbed me!"

As usual, he could not find the effective or clever thing to say.

"I did not mean to," he replied simply; but Betty, glancing at him, saw something in his face which gripped her heart. A lump rose in her throat.

"Do let's go and find Ermyntrude!" she said.

But Wharton had barely begun his talk with Marcella when a gentleman, on his way to the buffet with a cup to set down, touched him on the arm. Wharton turned in some astonishment and annoyance. He saw a youngish, good-looking man, well known to him as already one of the most important solicitors in London, largely trusted by many rich or eminent persons.

"May I have a word with you presently?" said Mr. Pearson, in a pleasant undertone. "I have something of interest to say to you, and it occurred to me that I might meet you to-night. Excuse my interrupting you."

He glanced with admiration at Marcella, who had turned away.

Wharton had a momentary qualm. Then it struck him that Mr. Pearson's manner was decidedly friendly.

"In a moment," he said. "We might find a corner, I think, in that further room."

He made a motion of the head towards a little boudoir which lay beyond the tea-room.

Mr. Pearson nodded and passed on.

Wharton returned to Marcella, who had fallen back on Frank Leven. At the approach of the member for West Brookshire, Lady Winterbourne and her daughter had moved severely away to the further end of the buffet.

"A tiresome man wants me on business for a moment," he said; then he dropped his voice a little; "but I have been looking forward to this evening, this chance, for days — shall I find you here again in five minutes?"

Marcella, who had flushed brightly, said that would depend on the time and Lady Winterbourne. He hurried away with a little gesture of despair. Frank followed him with a sarcastic eye.

"Any one would think he was prime minister already! I never met him yet anywhere that he hadn't some business on hand. Why does he behave as though he had the world on his shoulders? Your *real* swells always seem to have nothing to do."

"Do you know so many busy people?" Marcella asked him sweetly.

"Oh, you shan't put me down, Miss Boyce!" said the boy, sulkily thrusting his hands into his pockets. "I am going to work like blazes this winter, if only my dons will let a fellow alone. I say, isn't she *ripping* to-night — Betty?"

And, pulling his moustache in helpless jealousy and annoyance, he stared at the Winterbourne group across the room, which had been now joined by Aldous Raeburn and Betty, standing side by side.

"What do you want me to say?" said Marcella, with

a little cold laugh. "I shall make you worse if I praise her. Please put my cup down."

At the same moment she saw Wharton coming back to her — Mr. Pearson behind him, smiling, and gently twirling the seals of his watch-chain. She was instantly struck by Wharton's look of excitement, and by the manner in which — with a momentary glance aside at the Winterbourne party — he approached her.

"There is such a charming little room in there," he said, stooping his head to her, "and so cool after this heat. Won't you try it?"

The energy of his bright eye took possession of her. He led the way; she followed. Her dress almost brushed Aldous Raeburn as she passed.

He took her into a tiny room. There was no one else there, and he found a seat for her by an open window, where they were almost hidden from view by a stand of flowers.

As he sat down again by her, she saw that a decisive moment had come, and blanched almost to the colour of her dress. Oh! what to do! Her heart cried out vaguely to some power beyond itself for guidance, then gave itself up again to the wayward thirst for happiness.

He took her hand strongly in both his own, and bending towards her as she sat bowered among the scent and colours of the flowers, he made her a passionate declaration. From the first moment that he had seen her under the Chiltern beeches, so he vowed, he had felt in her the supreme, incomparable attraction which binds a man to one woman, and one only. His

six weeks under her father's roof had produced in him feelings which he knew to be wrong, without thereby finding in himself any power to check them. They had betrayed him into a mad moment, which he had regretted bitterly because it had given her pain. Otherwise — his voice dropped and shook, his hand pressed hers — "I lived for months on the memory of that one instant." But he had respected her suffering, her struggle, her need for rest of mind and body. For her sake he had gone away into silence; he had put a force upon himself which had alone enabled him to get through his parliamentary work.

Then, with his first sight of her in that little homely room and dress — so changed, but so lovely! — everything — admiration, passion — had revived with double strength. Since that meeting he must have often puzzled her, as he had puzzled himself. His life had been a series of perplexities. He was not his own master; he was the servant of a cause, in which — however foolishly a mocking habit might have led him at times to be-little his own enthusiasms and hers — his life and honour were engaged; and this cause and his part in it had been for long hampered, and all his clearness of vision and judgment dimmed by the pressure of a number of difficulties and worries he could not have discussed with her — worries practical and financial, connected with the *Clarion*, with the experiments he had been carrying out on his estate, and with other troublesome matters. He had felt a thousand times that his fortunes, political or private, were too doubtful and perilous to allow him to ask any woman to share them. — Then, again, he had seen her

— and his resolution, his scruple, had melted in his breast!

Well! there were still troubles in front! But he was no longer cowed by them. In spite of them, he dared now to throw himself at her feet, to ask her to come and share a life of combat and of labour, to bring her beauty and her mind to the joint conduct of a great enterprise. To *her* a man might show his effort and his toil, — from *her* he might claim a sympathy it would be vain to ask of any smaller woman.

Then suddenly he broke down. Speech seemed to fail him. Only his eyes — more intense and piercing under their straight brows than she had ever known them — beseeched her — his hand sought hers.

She meanwhile sat in a trance of agitation, mistress neither of reason nor of feeling. She felt his spell, as she had always done. The woman in her thrilled at last to the mere name and neighbourhood of love. The heart in her cried out that pain and loss could only be deadened so — the past could only be silenced by filling the present with movement and warm life.

Yet what tremors of conscience — what radical distrust of herself and him! And the first articulate words she found to say to him were very much what she had said to Aldous so long ago — only filled with a bitterer and more realised content.

"After all, what do we know of each other! You don't know me — not as I am. And I feel — "

"Doubts?" he said, smiling. "Do you imagine that that seems anything but natural to me? *I* can have none; but *you* — After all, we are not quite boy

and girl, you and I; we have lived, both of us! But ask yourself — has not destiny brought us together? Think of it all!"

Their eyes met again. Hers sank under the penetration, the flame of his. Yet, throughout, he was conscious of the doorway to his right, of the figures incessantly moving across it. His own eloquence had convinced and moved himself abundantly. Yet, as he saw her yielding, he was filled with the strangest mixture of passion — and a sort of disillusion — almost contempt! If she had turned from him with the dignity worthy of that head and brow, it flashed across him that he could have tasted more of the *abandonment* of love — have explored his own emotion more perfectly.

Still, the situation was poignant enough — in one sense complete. Was Raeburn still there — in that next room?

"My answer?" he said to her, pressing her hand as they sat in the shelter of the flowers. For *he* was aware of the practical facts — the hour, the place — if she was not.

She roused herself.

"I can't," she said, making a movement to rise, which his strong grasp, however, prevented. "I *can't* answer you to-night, Mr. Wharton. I should have much to think over — so much! It might all look quite different to me. You must give me time."

"To-morrow?" he said quietly.

"No!" she said impetuously, "not to-morrow; I go back to my work, and I must have quiet and time. In a fortnight — not before. I will write."

"Oh, impossible!" he said, with a little frown.

And still holding her, he drew her towards him. His gaze ran over the face, the warm whiteness under the lace of the dress, the beautiful arms. She shrank from it — feeling a sudden movement of dislike and fear; but before she could disengage herself he had pressed his lips on the arm nearest to him.

"I gave you no leave!" she said passionately, under her breath, as he let her go.

He met her flashing look with tender humbleness.

"*Marcella!*"

The word was just breathed into the air. She wavered — yet a chill had passed over her. She could not recover the moment of magic.

"*Not* to-morrow," she repeated steadily, though dreading lest she should burst into tears, "and not till I see clearly — till I can —" She caught her breath. "Now I am going back to Lady Winterbourne."

CHAPTER XIV.

For some hours after he reached his own room, Wharton sat in front of his open window, sunk in the swift rushing of thought, as a bramble sways in a river. The July night first paled, then flushed into morning; the sun rose above the empty street and the light mists enwrapping the great city, before he threw himself on his bed, exhausted enough at last to fall into a restless sleep.

The speculation of those quick-pulsed hours was in the end about equally divided between Marcella and the phrases and turns of his interview with Mr. Pearson. It was the sudden leap of troubled excitement stirred in him by that interview — heightened by the sight of Raeburn — that had driven him past recall by the most natural of transitions, into his declaration to Marcella.

But he had no sooner reached his room than, at first with iron will, he put the thought of Marcella, of the scene which had just passed, away from him. His pulses were still quivering. No matter! It was the brain he had need of. He set it coolly and keenly to work.

Mr. Pearson? Well! — Mr. Pearson had offered him a *bribe;* there could be no question as to that. His clear sense never blinked the matter for an instant. Nor had he any illusions as to his own behaviour. Even

now he had no further right to the sleep of the honest man.

Let him realise, however, what had happened. He had gone to Lady Masterton's party, in the temper of a man who knows that ruin is upon him, and determined, like the French criminal, to exact his cigar and *eau de vie* before the knife falls. Never had things looked so desperate; never had all resource seemed to him so completely exhausted. Bankruptcy must come in the course of a few weeks; his entailed property would pass into the hands of a receiver; and whatever recovery might be ultimately possible, by the end of August he would be, for the moment, socially and politically undone.

There could be no question of his proposing seriously to Marcella Boyce. Nevertheless, he had gone to Lady Masterton's on purpose to meet her; and his manner on seeing her had asserted precisely the same intimate claim upon her, which, during the past six weeks, had alternately attracted and repelled her.

Then Mr. Pearson had interrupted.

Wharton, shutting his eyes, could see the great man lean against the window-frame close to the spot where, a quarter of an hour later, Marcella had sat among the flowers — the dapper figure, the long, fair moustaches, the hand playing with the eye-glass.

"I have been asked — er — er — " What a conceited manner the fellow had! — "to get some conversation with you, Mr. Wharton, on the subject of the Damesley strike. You give me leave?"

Whereupon, in less than ten minutes, the speaker had executed an important commission, and, in offering

Wharton a bribe of the most bare-faced kind, had also found time for supplying him with a number of the most delicate and sufficient excuses for taking it.

The masters, in fact, sent an embassy. They fully admitted the power of the *Clarion* and its owner. No doubt, it would not be possible for the paper to keep up its strike fund indefinitely; there were perhaps already signs of slackening. Still it had been maintained for a considerable time; and so long as it was reckoned on, in spite of the wide-spread misery and suffering now prevailing, the men would probably hold out.

In these circumstances, the principal employers concerned had thought it best to approach so formidable an opponent and to put before him information which might possibly modify his action. They had authorised Mr. Pearson to give him a full account of what was proposed in the way of re-organisation of the trade, including the probable advantages which the work-people themselves would be likely to reap from it in the future.

Mr. Pearson ran in a few sentences through the points of the scheme. Wharton stood about a yard away from him, his hands in his pockets, a little pale and frowning — looking intently at the speaker.

Then Mr. Pearson paused and cleared his throat.

Well! — that was the scheme. His principals believed that, when both it and the employers' determination to transfer their business to the Continent rather than be beaten by the men were made fully known to the owner of the *Clarion*, it must affect his point of view. Mr. Pearson was empowered to give him any details he might desire. Meanwhile — so confident

were they in the reasonableness of the case that they even suggested that the owner of the *Clarion* himself should take part in the new Syndicate. On condition of his future co-operation — it being understood that the masters took their stand irrevocably on the award — the men at present responsible for the formation of the Syndicate proposed to allot Mr. Wharton ten Founder's Shares in the new undertaking.

Wharton, sitting alone, recalling these things, was conscious again of that start in every limb, that sudden rush of blood to the face, as though a lash had struck him.

For in a few seconds his mind took in the situation. Only the day before, a city acquaintance had said to him, "If you and your confounded paper were out of the way, and this thing could be placed properly on the market, there would be a boom in it at once. I am told that in twenty-four hours the Founder's Shares would be worth 2,000*l.* apiece!"

There was a pause of silence. Then Wharton threw a queer dark look at the solicitor, and was conscious that his pulse was thumping.

"There can be no question I think, Mr. Pearson — between you and me — as to the nature of such a proposal as that!"

"My dear sir," Mr. Pearson had interrupted hastily, "let me, above all, ask you to take *time* — time enough, at any rate, to turn the matter well over in your mind. The interests of a great many people, besides yourself, are concerned. Don't give me an answer to-night; it is the last thing I desire. I have thrown out my suggestion. Consider it. To-morrow

is Sunday. If you are disposed to carry it further, come and see me Monday morning — that's all. I will be at your service at any hour, and I can then give you a much more complete outline of the intentions of the Company. Now I really must go and look for Mrs. Pearson's carriage."

Wharton followed the great man half mechanically across the little room, his mind in a whirl of mingled rage and desire. Then suddenly he stopped his companion:

"Has George Denny anything to do with this proposal, Mr. Pearson?"

Mr. Pearson paused, with a little air of vague cogitation.

"George Denny? Mr. George Denny, the member for Westropp? I have had no dealings whatever with that gentleman in the matter."

Wharton let him pass.

Then as he himself entered the tea-room, he perceived the bending form of Aldous Raeburn chatting to Lady Winterbourne on his right, and that tall whiteness close in front, waiting for him.

His brain cleared in a flash. He was perfectly conscious that a bribe had just been offered him, of the most daring and cynical kind, and that he had received the offer in the tamest way. An insult had been put upon him which had for ever revealed the estimate held of him by certain shrewd people, for ever degraded him in his own eyes.

Nevertheless, he was also conscious that the thing was done. The bribe would be accepted, the risk taken. So far as his money-matters were concerned

he was once more a free man. The mind had adjusted itself, reached its decision in a few minutes.

And the first effect of the mingled excitement and self-contempt which the decision brought with it had been to drive him into the scene with Marcella. Instinctively he asked of passion to deliver him quickly from the smart of a new and very disagreeable experience.

Well! why should he not take these men's offer?

He was as much convinced as they that this whole matter of the strike had of late come to a deadlock. So long as the public would give, the workers, passionately certain of the justice of their own cause, and filled with new ambitions after more decent living, would hold out. On the other hand, he perfectly understood that the masters had also in many ways a strong case, that they had been very hard hit by the strike, and that many of them would rather close their works or transfer them bodily to the Continent than give way. Some of the facts Pearson had found time to mention had been certainly new and striking.

At the same time he never disguised from himself for an instant that but for a prospective 20,000*l.* the facts concerned would not have affected him in the least. Till to-night it had been to his interest to back the strike, and to harass the employers. Now things were changed; and he took a curious satisfaction in the quick movements of his own intelligence, as his thought rapidly sketched the "curve" the *Clarion* would have to take, and the arguments by which he would commend it.

As to his shares, they would be convertible of course into immediate cash. Some man of straw would be forthcoming to buy what he would possess in the name of another man of straw. It was not supposed — he took for granted — by the men who had dared to tempt him, that he would risk his whole political reputation and career for anything less than a bird in the hand.

Well! what were the chances of secrecy?

Naturally *they* stood to lose less by disclosure, a good deal, than he did. And Denny, one of the principal employers, was his personal enemy. He would be likely enough for the present to keep his name out of the affair. But no man of the world could suppose that the transaction would pass without his knowledge. Wharton's own hasty question to Mr. Pearson on the subject seemed to himself now, in cold blood, a remarkably foolish one.

He walked up and down thinking this point out. It was the bitter pill of the whole affair.

In the end, with a sudden recklessness of youth and resource, he resolved to dare it. There would *not* be much risk. Men of business do not as a rule blazon their own dirty work, and public opinion would be important to the new Syndicate.

Some risk, of course, there would be. Well! his risks, as they stood, were pretty considerable. He chose the lesser — not without something of a struggle, some keen personal smart. He had done a good many mean and questionable things in his time, but never anything as gross as this. The thought of what his relation to a certain group of men — to Denny

especially — would be in the future, stung sharply. But it is the part of the man of action to put both scruple and fear behind him on occasion. His career was in question.

Craven? Well, Craven would be a difficulty. He would telegraph to him first thing in the morning before the offices closed, and see him on Monday. For Marcella's sake the man must be managed — somehow.

And — Marcella! How should she ever know, ever suspect! She already disliked the violence with which the paper had supported the strike. He would find no difficulty whatever in justifying all that she or the public would see, to her.

Then insensibly he let his thoughts glide into thinking of the money. Presently he drew a sheet of paper towards him and covered it with calculations as to his liabilities. By George! how well it worked out! By the time he threw it aside, and walked to the window for air, he already felt himself a *bonâ-fide* supporter of the Syndicate — the promoter in the public interest of a just and well-considered scheme.

Finally, with a little joyous energetic movement which betrayed the inner man, he flung down his cigarette, and turned to write an ardent letter to Marcella, while the morning sun stole into the dusty room.

Difficult? of course! Both now and in the future. It would take him half his time yet — and he could ill afford it — to bring her bound and captive. He recognised in her the southern element, so strangely mated with the moral English temper. Yet he smiled over

it. The subtleties of the struggle he foresaw enchanted him.

And she would be mastered! In this heightened state of nerve his man's resolution only rose the more fiercely to the challenge of her resistance.

Nor should she cheat him with long delays. His income would be his own again, and life decently easy. He already felt himself the vain showman of her beauty.

A thought of Lady Selina crossed his mind, producing amusement and compassion — indulgent amusement, such as the young man is apt to feel towards the spinster of thirty-five who pays him attention. A certain sense of re-habilitation, too, which at the moment was particularly welcome. For, no doubt, he might have married her and her fortune had he so chosen. As it was, why didn't she find some needy boy to take pity on her? There were plenty going, and she must have abundance of money. Old Alresford, too, was fast doddering off the stage, and then where would she be — without Alresford House, or Busbridge, or those various other pedestals which had hitherto held her aloft?

Early on Sunday morning Wharton telegraphed to Craven, directing him to "come up at once for consultation." The rest of the day the owner of the *Clarion* spent pleasantly on the river with Mrs. Lane and a party of ladies, including a young Duchess, who was pretty, literary, and socialistic. At night he went down to the *Clarion* office, and produced a leader on the position of affairs at Damesley which, to the practised

eye, contained one paragraph — but one only — wherein the dawn of a new policy might have been discerned.

Naturally the juxtaposition of events at the moment gave him considerable anxiety. He knew very well that the Damesley bargain could not be kept waiting. The masters were losing heavily every day, and were not likely to let him postpone the execution of his part of the contract for a fortnight or so to suit his own convenience. It was like the sale of an "old master." His influence must be sold now — at the ripe moment — or not at all.

At the same time it was very awkward. In one short fortnight the meeting of the party would be upon him. Surrender on the Damesley question would give great offence to many of the Labour members. It would have to be very carefully managed — very carefully thought out.

By eleven o'clock on Monday he was in Mr. Pearson's office. After the first involuntary smile, concealed by the fair moustaches, and instantly dismissed, with which the eminent lawyer greeted the announcement of his visitor's name, the two augurs carried through their affairs with perfect decorum. Wharton realised, indeed, that he was being firmly handled. Mr. Pearson gave the *Clarion* a week in which to accomplish its retreat and drop its strike fund. And the fund was to be "checked" as soon as possible.

A little later, when Wharton abruptly demanded a guarantee of secrecy, Mr. Pearson allowed himself his first — visible — smile.

"My dear sir, are such things generally made public

property? I can give you no better assurance than you can extract yourself from the circumstances. As to writing — well! — I should advise you very strongly against anything of the sort. A long experience has convinced me that in any delicate negotiation the less that is *written* the better."

Towards the end Wharton turned upon his companion sharply, and asked:

"How did you discover that I wanted money?"

Mr. Pearson lifted his eyebrows pleasantly.

"Most of the things in this world, Mr. Wharton, that one wants to know, can be found out. Now — I have no wish to hurry you — not in the least, but I may perhaps mention that I have an important appointment directly. Don't you think — we might settle our business?"

Wharton was half-humorously conscious of an inward leap of fury with the necessities which had given this man — to whom he had taken an instantaneous dislike — the power of dealing thus summarily with the member for West Brookshire. However, there was no help for it; he submitted, and twenty minutes afterwards he left Lincoln's Inn carrying documents in the breast-pocket of his coat which, when brought under his bankers' notice, would be worth to him an immediate advance of some eight thousand pounds. The remainder of the purchase-money for his "shares" would be paid over to him as soon as his part of the contract had been carried out.

He did not, however, go to his bank, but straight to the *Clarion* office, where he had a mid-day appointment with Louis Craven.

At first sight of the tall, narrow-shouldered form and anxious face waiting for him in his private room, Wharton felt a movement of ill-humour.

Craven had the morning's *Clarion* in his hand.

"This *cannot* mean" — he said, when they had exchanged a brief salutation — "that the paper is backing out?"

He pointed to the suspicious paragraph in Wharton's leader, his delicate features quivering with an excitement he could ill repress.

"Well, let us sit down and discuss the thing," said Wharton, closing the door, "that's what I wired to you for."

He offered Craven a cigarette, which was refused, took one himself, and the two men sat confronting each other with a writing-table between them. Wharton was disagreeably conscious at times of the stiff papers in his coat-pocket, and was perhaps a little paler than usual. Otherwise he showed no trace of mental disturbance; and Craven, himself jaded and sleepless, was struck with a momentary perception of his companion's boyish good looks — the tumbling curls, that Wharton straightened now and then, the charming blue eyes, the athlete's frame. Any stranger would have taken Craven for the older man; in reality it was the other way.

The conversation lasted nearly an hour. Craven exhausted both argument and entreaty, though when the completeness of the retreat resolved upon had been disclosed to him, the feeling roused in him was so fierce that he could barely maintain his composure. He had been living among scenes of starvation and

endurance, which, to his mind, had all the character of martyrdom. These men and women were struggling for two objects — the power to live more humanly, and the free right of combination — to both of which, if need were, he would have given his own life to help them without an instant's hesitation. Behind his blinking manner he saw everything with the idealist's intensity, the reformer's passion. To be fair to an employer was not in his power. To spend his last breath, were it called for, in the attempt to succour the working-man against his capitalist oppressors, would have seemed to him the merest matter of course.

And his mental acuteness was quite equal to his enthusiasm, and far more evident. In his talk with Wharton, he for a long time avoided, as before, out of a certain inner disdain, the smallest touch of sentiment. He pointed out — what, indeed, Wharton well knew — that the next two or three weeks of the strike would be the most critical period in its history; that, if the work-people could only be carried through them, they were almost sure of victory. He gave his own reasons for believing that the employers could ultimately be coerced, he offered proof of yielding among them, proof also that the better men in their ranks were fully alive to and ashamed of the condition of the workers. As to the Syndicate, he saw no objection to it, *provided* the workers' claims were first admitted. Otherwise it would only prove a more powerful engine of oppression.

Wharton's arguments may perhaps be left to the imagination. He would have liked simply to play the proprietor and the master — to say, "This is my

decision, those are my terms — take my work or leave it." But Craven was Miss Boyce's friend; he was also a Venturist. Chafing under both facts, Wharton found that he must state his case.

And he did state it with his usual ability. He laid great stress on "information from a private source which I cannot disregard," to the effect that, if the resistance went on, the trade would be broken up; that several of the largest employers were on the point of making arrangements for Italian factories.

"I know," he said finally, "that but for the *Clarion* the strike would drop. Well! I have come to the conclusion that the responsibility is too heavy. I shall be doing the men themselves more harm than good. There is the case in a nutshell. We differ — I can't help that. The responsibility is mine."

Craven rose with a quick, nervous movement. The prophet spoke at last.

"You understand," he said, laying a thin hand on the table, "that the condition of the workers in this trade is *infamous!* — that the award and your action together plunge them back into a state of things which is a *shame* and a *curse* to England!"

Wharton made no answer. He, too, had risen, and was putting away some papers in a drawer. A tremor ran through Craven's tall frame; and for an instant, as his eye rested on his companion, the idea of foul play crossed his mind. He cast it out, that he might deal calmly with his own position.

"Of course, you perceive," he said, as he took up his hat, "that I can no longer on these terms remain the *Clarion's* correspondent. Somebody else must be found to do this business."

"I regret your decision, immensely," said Wharton, with perfect suavity, "but of course I understand it. I trust, however, that you will not leave us altogether. I can give you plenty of work that will suit you. Here, for instance"—he pointed to a pile of Blue Books from the Labour Commission lying on the table—"are a number of reports that want analysing and putting before the public. You could do them in town at your leisure."

Craven struggled with himself. His first instinct was to fling the offer in Wharton's face. Then he thought of his wife; of the tiny new household just started with such small, happy, self-denying shifts; of the woman's inevitable lot, of the hope of a child.

"Thank you," he said, in a husky voice. "I will consider, I will write."

Wharton nodded to him pleasantly, and he went.

The owner of the *Clarion* drew a long breath.

"Now I think on the whole it would serve my purpose best to sit down and write to *her*—after that. It would be well that *my* account should come first."

A few hours later, after an interview with his bankers and a further spell of letter-writing, Wharton descended the steps of his club in a curious restless state. The mortgage on the *Clarion* had been arranged for, his gambling debts settled, and all his other money matters were successfully in train. Nevertheless, the exhilaration of the morning had passed into misgiving and depression.

Vague presentiments hung about him all day, whether in the House of Commons or elsewhere, and

it was not till he found himself on his legs at a crowded meeting at Rotherhithe, violently attacking the Government Bill and the House of Lords, that he recovered that easy confidence in the general favourableness of the universe to Harry Wharton, and Harry Wharton's plans, which lent him so much of his power.

A letter from Marcella — written before she had received either of his — reached him at the House just before he started for his meeting. A touching letter! — yet with a certain resolution in it which disconcerted him.

"Forget, if you will, everything that you said to me last night. It might be — I believe it would be — best for us both. But if you will not — if I must give my answer, then, as I said, I must have time. It is only quite recently that I have *realised* the enormity of what I did last year. I must run no risks of so wrenching my own life — or another's — a second time. Not to be *sure* is for me torment. Why perfect simplicity of feeling — which would scorn the very notion of questioning itself — seems to be beyond me, I do not know. That it is so fills me with a sort of shame and bitterness. But I must follow my nature.

"So let me think it out. I believe you know, for one thing, that your 'cause,' your life-work, attracts me strongly. I should not any longer accept all you say, as I did last year. But mere opinion matters infinitely less to me than it did. I can imagine now agreeing with a friend 'in everything except opinion.' All that would matter to me now would be to feel that *your* heart was wholly in your work, in your

public acts, so that I might still admire and love all that I might differ from. But there — for we must be frank with each other — is just my difficulty. *Why* do you do so many contradictory things? Why do you talk of the poor, of labour, of self-denial, and live whenever you can with the idle rich people, who hate all three in their hearts? You talk their language; you scorn what they scorn, or so it seems; you accept their standards. Oh! — to the really 'consecrate' in heart and thought I could give my life so easily, so slavishly even! There is no one weaker than I in the world. I must have strength to lean upon — and a strength, pure at the core, that I can respect and follow.

"Here in this nursing life of mine, I go in and out among people to the best of whom life is very real and simple — and often, of course, very sad. And I am another being in it from what I was at Lady Winterbourne's. Everything looks differently to me. No, no! you must please wait till the inner voice speaks so that I can hear it plainly — for your sake at least as much as for mine. If you persisted in coming to see me now, I should have to put an end to it all."

"Strange is the modern woman!" thought Wharton to himself, not without sharp pique, as he pondered that letter in the course of his drive home from the meeting. "I talk to her of passion, and she asks me in return why I do things inconsistent with my political opinions! puts me through a moral catechism, in fact! What is the meaning of it all — confound it! — her state of mind and mine? Is the good old *ars amandi* perishing out of the world? Let some Stendhal come and tell us why!"

But he sat up to answer her, and could not get free from an inward pleading or wrestle with her, which haunted him through all the intervals of these rapid days.

Life while they lasted was indeed a gymnast's contest of breath and endurance. The *Clarion* made its retreat in Wharton's finest style, and the fact rang through labouring England. The strike-leaders came up from the Midlands; Wharton had to see them. He was hotly attacked in the House privately, and even publicly by certain of his colleagues. Bennett showed concern and annoyance. Meanwhile the Conservative papers talked the usual employers' political economy; and the Liberal papers, whose support of the strike had been throughout perfunctory, and of no particular use to themselves or to other people, took a lead they were glad to get, and went in strongly for the award.

Through it all Wharton showed extraordinary skill. The columns of the *Clarion* teemed with sympathetic appeals to the strikers, flanked by long statements of "hard fact" — the details of foreign competition and the rest, the plans of the masters — freely supplied him by Mr. Pearson. With Bennett and his colleagues in the House he took a bold line; admitted that he had endangered his popularity both inside Parliament and out of it at a particularly critical moment; and implied, though he did not say, that some men were still capable of doing independent things to their own hurt. Meanwhile he pushed a number of other matters to the front, both in the paper and in his own daily doings. He made at least two important speeches

in the provinces, in the course of these days, on the Bill before the House of Lords; he asked questions in Parliament on the subject of the wages paid to Government employés; and he opened an attack on the report of a certain Conservative Commission which had been rousing the particular indignation of a large mass of South London working men.

At the end of ten days the strike was over; the workers, sullen and enraged, had submitted, and the plans of the Syndicate were in all the papers. Wharton, looking round him, realised to his own amazement that his political position had rather gained than suffered. The general impression produced by his action had been on the whole that of a man strong enough to take a line of his own, even at the risk of unpopularity. There was a new tone of respect among his opponents, and, resentful as some of the Labour members were, Wharton did not believe that what he had done would ultimately damage his chances on the 10th at all. He had vindicated his importance, and he held his head high, adopting towards his chances of the leadership a strong and careless tone that served him well.

Meanwhile there were, of course, clever people behind the scenes who looked on and laughed. But they held their tongues, and Wharton, who had carefully avoided the mention of names during the negotiations with Pearson, did his best to forget them. He felt uncomfortable, indeed, when he passed the portly Denny in the House or in the street. Denny had a way of looking at the member for West Brookshire out of the corner of a small, slit-like eye. He

did it more than usual during these days, and Wharton had only to say to himself that for all things there is a price — which the gods exact.

Wilkins, since the first disclosure of the *Clarion* change of policy, had been astonishingly quiet. Wharton had made certain of violent attack from him. On the contrary, Wilkins wore now in the House a subdued and pre-occupied air that escaped notice even with his own party in the general fulness of the public mind. A few caustic north-countryisms on the subject of the *Clarion* and its master did indeed escape him now and then, and were reported from mouth to mouth; but on the whole he lay very low.

Still, whether in elation or anxiety, Wharton seemed to himself throughout the whole period to be a *fighter*, straining every muscle, his back to the wall and his hand against every man. There at the end of the fortnight stood the three goal-posts that must be passed, in victory or defeat; the meeting that would for the present decide his parliamentary prospects, his interview with Marcella, and — the confounded annual meeting of the "People's Banking Company," with all its threatened annoyances.

He became, indeed, more and more occupied with this latter business as the days went on. But he could see no way of evading it. He would have to fight it; luckily, now, he had the money.

The annual meeting took place two days before that fixed for the committee of the Labour party. Wharton was not present at it, and in spite of ample warning he gave way to certain lively movements of disgust and depression when at his club he first got hold

of the evening papers containing the reports. His name, of course, figured amply in the denunciations heaped upon the directors of all dates; the sums which he with others were supposed to have made out of the first dealings with the shares on the Stock Exchange were freely mentioned; and the shareholders as a body had shown themselves most uncomfortably violent. He at once wrote off a letter to the papers disclaiming all responsibility for the worst irregularities which had occurred, and courting full enquiry — a letter which, as usual, both convinced and affected himself.

Then he went, restless and fuming, down to the House. Bennett passed him in the lobby with an uneasy and averted eye. Whereupon Wharton seized upon him, carried him into the Library, and talked to him, till Bennett, who, in spite of his extraordinary shrewdness and judgment in certain departments, was a babe in matters of company finance, wore a somewhat cheered countenance.

They came out into the lobby together, Wharton holding his head very high.

"I shall deal with the whole thing in my speech on Thursday!" he said aloud, as they parted.

Bennett gave him a friendly nod and smile.

There was in this little man, with his considerable brain and his poet's heart, something of the "imperishable child." Like a wholesome child, he did not easily "think evil"; his temper towards all men — even the owners of "way-leaves" and mining royalties — was optimist. He had the most naïve admiration for Wharton's ability, and for the academic attain-

ments he himself secretly pined for; and to the young complex personality itself he had taken from the beginning an unaccountable liking. The bond between the two, though incongruous and recent, was real; Wharton was as glad of Bennett's farewell kindness as Bennett had been of the younger man's explanations.

So that during that day and the next, Bennett went about contradicting, championing, explaining; while Wharton, laden with parliamentary business, vivid, unabashed, and resourceful, let it be known to all whom it concerned that in his solicitor's opinion he had a triumphant answer to all charges; and that meanwhile no one could wonder at the soreness of those poor devils of shareholders.

The hours passed on. Wednesday was mainly spent by Wharton in a series of conferences and intrigues either at the House or at his club; when he drove home exhausted at night he believed that all was arranged — the train irrevocably laid, and his nomination to the chairmanship of the party certain.

Wilkins and six or seven others would probably prove irreconcilable; but the vehemence and rancour shown by the great Nehemiah during the summer in the pursuit of his anti-Wharton campaign had to some extent defeated themselves. A personal grudge in the hands of a man of his type is not a formidable weapon. Wharton would have felt perfectly easy on the subject but for some odd bits of manner on Wilkins's part during the last forty-eight hours — whenever, in fact, the two men had run across each other in the House — marked by a sort of new and insolent

good humour, that puzzled him. But there is a bravado of defeat. Yes! — he thought Wilkins was disposed of.

From his present point of ease — debts paid, banker propitiated, income assured — it amazed him to look back on his condition of a fortnight before. Had the Prince of Darkness himself offered such a bargain it must have been accepted. After all his luck had held! Once get through this odious company business — as to which, with a pleasing consciousness of turning the tables, he had peremptorily instructed Mr. Pearson himself — and the barque of his fortunes was assured.

Then, with a quick turn of the mind, he threw the burden of affairs from him. His very hopefulness and satisfaction had softened his mood. There stole upon him the murmurs and voices of another world of thought — a world well known to his versatility by report, though he had as a rule small inclination to dwell therein. But he was touched and shaken to-night by his own achievement. The heavenly powers had been unexpectedly kind to him, and he was half moved to offer them something in return.

"Do as you are done by" — that was an ethic he understood. And in moments of feeling he was as ready to apply it to great Zeus himself as to his friends or enemies in the House of Commons. He had done this doubtful thing — but why should it ever be necessary for him to do another? Vague philosophic yearnings after virtue, moderation, patriotism, crossed his mind. The Pagan ideal sometimes smote and fired him, the Christian never. He could

still read his Plato and his Cicero, whereas gulfs of unfathomable distaste rolled between him and the New Testament. Perhaps the author of all authors for whom he had most relish was Montaigne. He would have taken him down to-night had there been nothing more kindling to think of.

Marcella! — ah! Marcella! He gave himself to the thought of her with a new and delightful tenderness which had in it elements of compunction. After those disagreeable paragraphs in the evening papers, he had instantly written to her. "Every public man" — he had said to her, finding instinctively the note of dignity that would appeal to her — "is liable at some period of his career to charges of this sort. They are at once exaggerated and blackened, because he is a public man. To you I owe perfect frankness, and you shall have it. Meanwhile I do not ask — I know — that you will be just to me, and put the matter out of your thoughts till I can discuss it with you. Two days more till I see your face! The time is long!"

To this there had been no answer. Her last letter indeed had rung sadly and coldly. No doubt Louis Craven had something to do with it. It would have alarmed him could he simply have found the time to think about it. Yet she was ready to see him on the 11th; and his confidence in his own powers of managing fate was tougher than ever. What pleasant lies he had told her at Lady Masterton's! Well! What passion ever yet but had its subterfuges? One more wrestle, and he would have tamed her to his wish, wild falcon that she was. Then — pleasure and brave

living! And she also should have her way. She should breathe into him the language of those great illusions he had found it of late so hard to feign with her; and they two would walk and rule a yielding world together. Action, passion, affairs — life explored and exploited — and at last — "*que la mort me treuve plantant mes choulx — mais nonchalant d'elle! — et encore plus de mon jardin imparfaict!*"

He declaimed the words of the great Frenchman with something of the same temper in which the devout man would have made an act of faith. Then, with a long breath and a curious emotion, he went to try and sleep himself into the new day.

CHAPTER XV.

THE following afternoon about six o'clock Marcella came in from her second round. After a very busy week, work happened to be slack; and she had been attending one or two cases in and near Brown's Buildings rather because they were near than because they seriously wanted her. She looked to see whether there was any letter or telegram from the office which would have obliged her to go out again. Nothing was to be seen; and she put down her bag and cloak, childishly glad of the extra hour of rest.

She was, indeed, pale and worn. The moral struggle which had filled the past fortnight from end to end had deepened all the grooves and strained the forces of life; and the path, though glimmering, was not wholly plain.

A letter lay unfinished in her drawer — if she sent it that night, there would be little necessity or inducement for Wharton to climb those stairs on the morrow. Yet, if he held her to it, she must see him.

As the sunset and the dusk crept on she still sat silent and alone, sunk in a depression which showed itself in every line of the drooping form. She was degraded in her own eyes. The nature of the impulses which had led her to give Wharton the hold upon her she had given him had become plain to her. What lay between them, and the worst impulses that

poison the lives of women, but differences of degree, of expression? After those wild hours of sensuous revolt, a kind of moral terror was upon her.

What had worked in her? What was at the root of this vehemence of moral reaction, this haunting fear of losing for ever the *best* in life — self-respect, the comradeship of the good, communion with things noble and unstained — which had conquered at last the mere *woman*, the weakness of vanity and of sex? She hardly knew. Only there was in her a sort of vague thankfulness *for her daily work.* It did not seem to be possible to see one's own life solely under the aspects of selfish desire while hands and mind were busy with the piteous realities of sickness and of death. From every act of service — from every contact with the patience and simplicity of the poor — *something* had spoken to her, that divine ineffable something for ever "set in the world," like beauty, like charm, for the winning of men to itself. "Follow truth!" it said to her in faint mysterious breathings — "the truth of your own heart. The sorrow to which it will lead you is the only *joy* that remains to you."

Suddenly she looked round her little room with a rush of tenderness. The windows were open to the evening and the shouts of children playing in the courtyard came floating up. A bowl of Mellor roses scented the air; the tray for her simple meal stood ready, and beside it a volume of "The Divine Comedy," one of her mother's very rare gifts to her, in her motherless youth — for of late she had turned thirstily to poetry. There was a great peace and

plainness about it all; and, besides, touches of beauty — tokens of the soul. Her work spoke in it; called to her; promised comfort and ennobling. She thought with yearning, too, of her parents; of the autumn holiday she was soon to spend with them. Her heart went out — sorely — to all the primal claims upon it.

Nevertheless, clear as was the inner resolution, the immediate future filled her with dread. Her ignorance of herself — her excitable folly — had given Wharton rights which her conscience admitted. He would not let her go without a struggle, and she must face it.

As to the incidents which had happened during the fortnight — Louis Craven's return, and the scandal of the "People's Banking Company" — they had troubled and distressed her; but it would not be true to say that they had had any part in shaping her slow determination. Louis Craven was sore and bitter. She was very sorry for him; and his reports of the Damesley strikers made her miserable. But she took Wharton's "leaders" in the *Clarion* for another equally competent opinion on the same subject; and told herself that she was no judge. As for the Company scandal, she had instantly and proudly responded to the appeal of his letter, and put the matter out of her thoughts, till at least he should give his own account. So much at any rate she owed to the man who had stood by her through the Hurd trial. Marcella Boyce would not readily believe in his dishonour! She did not in fact believe it. In spite of later misgivings, the impression of his personality, as she had first conceived it, in the early days at Mellor, was still too strong.

No — rather — she had constantly recollected throughout the day what was going on in Parliament. These were for him testing and critical hours, and she felt a wistful sympathy. Let him only rise to his part — take up his great task.

An imperious knocking on her thin outer door roused her. She went to open it and saw Anthony Craven, — the perspiration standing on his brow, his delicate cripple's face white and fierce.

"I want to talk to you," he said without preface. "Have you seen the afternoon papers?"

"No," she said in astonishment, "I was just going to send for them. What is wrong?"

He followed her into the sitting-room without speaking; and then he unfolded the *Pall Mall* he had in his hand and pointed to a large-print paragraph on the central page with a shaking hand.

Marcella read:

"EXCITING SCENES IN THE HOUSE. — MEETING OF THE LABOUR MEMBERS. — A committee of the Labour representatives in Parliament met this afternoon at 2 o'clock for the purpose of electing a chairman, and appointing whips to the party, thus constituting a separate parliamentary group. Much interest was felt in the proceedings, which it was universally supposed would lead to the appointment of Mr. H. S. Wharton, the member for West Brookshire, as chairman and leader of the Labour party. The excitement of the meeting and in the House may be imagined when — after a short but very cordial and effective speech from Mr. Bennett, the member for North Whinwick, in sup-

port of Mr. Wharton's candidature — Mr. Wilkins, the miner's member for Derlingham, rose and made a series of astounding charges against the personal honour of the member for West Brookshire. Put briefly, they amount to this: that during the recent strike at Damesley the support of the *Clarion* newspaper, of which Mr. Wharton is owner and practically editor, was *bought* by the employers in return for certain shares in the new Syndicate; that the money for these shares — which is put as high as 20,000*l.* — had already gone into Mr. Wharton's private pocket; and that the change of policy on the part of the *Clarion*, which led to the collapse of the strike, was thus entirely due to what the Labour members can only regard under the circumstances as a bribe of a most disgraceful kind. The effect produced has been enormous. The debate is still proceeding, and reporters have been excluded. But I hope to send a fuller account later."

Marcella dropped the paper from her hand.

"What does it mean?" she said to her companion.

"Precisely what it says," replied Anthony, with a nervous impatience he could not repress. "Now," he added, as his lameness forced him to sit down, "will you kindly allow me some conversation with you? It was you — practically — who introduced Louis to that man. You meant well to Louis, and Mr. Wharton has been your friend. We therefore feel that we owe you some explanation. For that paragraph" — he pointed to the paper — "is, substantially — Louis's doing, and mine."

"*Yours?*" she said mechanically. "But Louis has been going on working for the paper — I persuaded him."

"I know. It was not we who actually discovered the thing. But we set a friend to work. Louis has had his suspicions all along. And at last — by the merest chance — we got the facts."

Then he told the story, staring at her the while with his sparkling eyes, his thin invalid's fingers fidgeting with his hat. If there was in truth any idea in his mind that the relations between his companion and Harry Wharton were more than those of friendship, it did not avail to make him spare her in the least. He was absorbed in vindictive feeling, which applied to her also. He might *say* for form's sake that she had meant well; but in fact he regarded her at this moment as a sort of odious Canidia whose one function had been to lure Louis to misfortune. Cut off himself, by half a score of peculiarities, physical and other, from love, pleasure, and power, Anthony Craven's whole affections and ambitions had for years centred in his brother. And now Louis was not only violently thrown out of employment, but compromised by the connection with the *Clarion;* was, moreover, saddled with a wife — and in debt.

So that his explanation was given with all the edge he could put upon it. Let her stop him, if she pleased! — but she did not stop him.

The facts were these:

Louis had, indeed, been persuaded by Marcella, for the sake of his wife and bread and butter, to go on working for the *Clarion*, as a reviewer. But his mind was all the time feverishly occupied with the apostasy of the paper and its causes. Remembering Wharton's sayings and letters throughout the struggle, he grew

less and less able to explain the incident by the reasons Wharton had himself supplied, and more and more convinced that there was some mystery behind.

He and Anthony talked the matter over perpetually. One evening Anthony brought home from a meeting of the Venturists that George Denny, the son of one of the principal employers in the Damesley trade, whose name he had mentioned once before in Marcella's ears. Denny was by this time the candidate for a Labour constituency, an ardent Venturist, and the laughing-stock of his capitalist family, with whom, however, he was still on more or less affectionate terms. His father thought him an incorrigible fool, and his mother wailed over him to her friends. But they were still glad to see him whenever he would condescend to visit them; and all friction on money matters was avoided by the fact that Denny had for long refused to take any pecuniary help from his father, and was nevertheless supporting himself tolerably by lecturing and literature.

Denny was admitted into the brothers' debate, and had indeed puzzled himself a good deal over the matter already. He had taken a lively interest in the strike, and the articles in the *Clarion* which led to its collapse had seemed to him both inexplicable and enraging.

After his talk with the Cravens, he went away, determined to dine at home on the earliest possible opportunity. He announced himself accordingly in Hertford Street, was received with open arms, and then deliberately set himself, at dinner and afterwards, to bait his father on social and political questions, which, as a rule, were avoided between them.

Old Denny fell into the trap, lost his temper and self-control completely, and at a mention of Harry Wharton — skilfully introduced at the precisely right moment — as an authority on some matter connected with the current Labour programme, he threw himself back in his chair with an angry laugh.

"Wharton? *Wharton?* You quote that fellow to *me?*"

"Why shouldn't I?" said the son, quietly.

"Because, my good sir, — he's a *rogue,* — that's all! — a common rogue, from my point of view even — still more from yours."

"I know that any vile tale you can believe about a Labour leader you do, father," said George Denny, with dignity.

Whereupon the older man thrust his hand into his coat-pocket, and drawing out a small leather case, in which he was apt to carry important papers about with him, extracted from it a list containing names and figures, and held it with a somewhat tremulous hand under his son's eyes.

"Read it, sir! and hold your tongue! Last week my friends and I *bought* that man — and his precious paper — for a trifle of 20,000*l.* or thereabouts. It paid us to do it, and we did it. I dare say *you* will think the proceeding questionable. In my eyes it was perfectly legitimate, a piece of *bonne guerre.* The man was ruining a whole industry. Some of us had taken his measure, had found out too — by good luck! — that he was in sore straits for money — mortgages on the paper, gambling debts, and a host of other things — discovered a shrewd man to play him, and made our

bid! He rose to it like a gudgeon — gave us no trouble whatever. I need not say, of course" — he added, looking up at his son — "that I have shown you that paper in the *very strictest confidence.* But it seemed to me it was my duty as a father to warn you of the nature of some of your associates!"

"I understand," said George Denny, as, after a careful study of the paper — which contained, for the help of the writer's memory, a list of the sums paid and founders' shares allotted to the various "promoters" of the new Syndicate — he restored it to its owner. "Well, I, father, have *this* to say in return. I came here to-night in the hope of getting from you this very information, and in the public interest I hold myself not only free but *bound* to make public use of it, at the earliest possible opportunity!"

The family scene may be imagined. But both threats and blandishments were entirely lost upon the son. There was in him an idealist obstinacy which listened to nothing but the cry of a *cause,* and he declared that nothing would or should prevent him from carrying the story of the bribe direct to Nehemiah Wilkins, Wharton's chief rival in the House, and so saving the country and the Labour party from the disaster and disgrace of Wharton's leadership. There was no time to lose, the party meeting in the House was only two days off.

At the end of a long struggle, which exhausted everybody concerned, and was carried on to a late hour of the night, Denny *père,* influenced by a desire to avoid worse things — conscious, too, of the abundant evidence he possessed of Wharton's acceptance and

private use of the money — and, probably, when it came to the point, not unwilling, — under compulsion! — to tumble such a hero from his pedestal, actually wrote, under his son's advice, a letter to Wilkins. It was couched in the most cautious language, and professed to be written in the interests of Wharton himself, to put an end "to certain ugly and unfounded rumours that have been brought to my knowledge." The negotiation itself was described in the driest business terms. "Mr. Wharton, upon cause shown, consented to take part in the founding of the Syndicate, and in return for his assistance, was allotted ten founders' shares in the new company. The transaction differed in nothing from those of ordinary business" — a last sentence slily added by the Socialist son, and innocently accepted by one of the shrewdest of men.

After which Master George Denny scarcely slept, and by nine o'clock next morning was in a hansom on his way to Wilkins's lodgings in Westminster. The glee of that black-bearded patriot hardly needs description. He flung himself on the letter with a delight and relief so exuberant that George Denny went off to another more phlegmatic member of the anti-Wharton "cave," with entreaties that an eye should be kept on the member for Derlingham, lest he should do or disclose anything before the dramatic moment.

Then he himself spent the next forty-eight hours in ingenious efforts to put together certain additional information as to the current value of founders' shares in the new company, the nature and amount of Wharton's

debts, and so on. Thanks to his father's hints he was able in the end to discover quite enough to furnish forth a supplementary statement. So that, when the 10th arrived, the day rose upon a group of men breathlessly awaiting a play within a play — with all their parts rehearsed, and the prompter ready.

Such in substance, was Anthony's story. So carried away was he by the excitement and triumph of it, that he soon ceased to notice what its effect might be upon his pale and quick-breathing companion.

"And now what has happened?" she asked him abruptly, when at last he paused.

"Why, you saw!" he said in astonishment, pointing to the evening paper — "at least the beginning of it. Louis is at the House now. I expect him every moment. He said he would follow me here."

Marcella pressed her hands upon her eyes a moment as though in pain. Anthony looked at her with a tardy prick of remorse.

"I hear Louis's knock!" he said, springing up. "May I let him in?" And, without waiting for reply, he hobbled as fast as his crutch would carry him to the outer door. Louis came in. Marcella rose mechanically. He paused on the threshold, his short sight trying to make her out in the dusk. Then his face softened and quivered. He walked forward quickly.

"I know you have something to forgive us," he said, "and that this will distress you. But we could not give you warning. Everything was so rapid, and the public interests involved so crushing."

He was flushed with vengeance and victory, but as

he approached her his look was deprecating — almost timid. Only the night before, Anthony for the first time had suggested to him an idea about her. He did not believe it — had had no time in truth to think of it in the rush of events. But now he saw her, the doubt pulled at his heart. Had he indeed stabbed the hand that had tried to help him?

Anthony touched him impatiently on the arm. "What has happened, Louis? I have shown Miss Boyce the first news."

"It is all over," said Louis, briefly. "The meeting was breaking up as I came away. It had lasted nearly five hours. There was a fierce fight, of course, between Wharton and Wilkins. Then Bennett withdrew his resolution, refused to be nominated himself — nearly broke down, in fact, they say; he had always been attached to Wharton, and had set his heart upon making him leader — and finally, after a long wrangle, Molloy was appointed chairman of the party."

"Good!" cried Anthony, not able to suppress the note of exultation.

Louis did not speak. He looked at Marcella.

"Did he defend himself?" she asked in a low, sharp voice.

Louis shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, yes. He spoke — but it did him no good. Everybody agreed that the speech was curiously ineffective. One would have expected him to do it better. But he seemed to be knocked over. He said, of course, that he had satisfied himself, and given proof in the paper, that the strike could not be maintained, and that being so he was free to join any syndicate he

pleased. But he spoke amid dead silence, and there was a general groan when he sat down. Oh, it was not this business only! Wilkins made great play in part of his speech with the Company scandal too. It is a complete smash all round."

"Which he will never get over?" said Marcella, quickly.

"Not with our men. What he may do elsewhere is another matter. Anthony has told you how it came out?"

She made a sign of assent. She was sitting erect and cold, her hands round her knees.

"I did not mean to keep anything from you," he said in a low voice, bending to her. "I know — you admired him — that he had given you cause. But — my mind has been on *fire* — ever since I came back from those Damesley scenes!"

She offered no reply. Silence fell upon all three for a minute or two; and in the twilight each could hardly distinguish the others. Every now and then the passionate tears rose in Marcella's eyes; her heart contracted. That very night when he spoke to her, when he used all those big words to her about his future, those great ends for which he had claimed her woman's help — he had these things in his mind.

"I think," said Louis Craven presently, touching her gently on the arm — he had tried once in vain to attract her attention — "I think I hear some one asking for you outside on the landing — Mrs. Hurd seems to be bringing them in."

As he spoke, Anthony suddenly sprang to his feet, and the outer door opened.

"Louis!" cried Anthony, "it is *he!*"

"Are yer at home, miss?" said Minta Hurd, puting in her head; "I can hardly see, it's so dark. Here's a gentleman wants to see you."

As she spoke, Wharton passed her, and stood — arrested — by the sight of the three figures. At the same moment Mrs. Hurd lit the gas in the little passage. The light streamed upon his face, and showed him the identity of the two men standing beside Marcella.

Never did Marcella forget that apparition — the young grace and power of the figure — the indefinable note of wreck, of catastrophe — the Lucifer brightness of the eyes in the set face. She moved forward. Anthony stopped her.

"Good-night, Miss Boyce!"

She shook hands unconsciously with him and with Louis. The two Cravens turned to the door. Wharton advanced into the room, and let them pass.

"You have been in a hurry to tell your story!" he said, as Louis walked by him.

Contemptuous hate breathed from every feature, but he was perfectly self-controlled.

"Yes —" said Cravèn, calmly — "Now it is your turn."

The door was no sooner shut than Wharton strode forward and caught her hand.

"They have told you everything? Ah! —"

His eye fell upon the evening paper. Letting her go, he felt for a chair and dropped into it. Throwing himself back, his hands behind his head, he drew a long breath and his eyes closed. For the first time

in his life or hers she saw him weak and spent like other men. Even his nerve had been worn down by the excitement of these five fighting hours. The eyes were lined and hollow — the brow contracted; the young roundness of the cheek was lost in the general pallor and patchiness of the skin; the lower part of the face seemed to have sharpened and lengthened, — and over the whole had passed a breath of something aging and withering the traces of which sent a shiver through Marcella. She sat down near him, still in her nurse's cloak, one trembling hand upon her lap.

"Will you tell me what made you do this?" she asked, not being able to think of anything else to say.

He opened his eyes with a start.

In that instant's quiet the scene he had just lived through had been rushing before him again — the long table in the panelled committee-room, the keen angry faces gathered about it. Bennett, in his blue tie and shabby black coat, the clear moist eyes vexed and miserable — Molloy, small and wiry, business-like in the midst of confusion, cool in the midst of tumult — and Wilkins, a black, hectoring leviathan, thundering on the table as he flung his broad Yorkshire across it, or mouthing out Denny's letter in the midst of the sudden electrical silence of some thirty amazed and incredulous hearers.

"*Spies*, yo call us?" with a finger like a dart, threatening the enemy — "Aye; an' yo're aboot reet! I and my friends — we *have* been trackin' and spyin' for weeks past. We *knew* those men, those starvin' women and bairns, were bein' *sold*, but we couldn't

prove it. Now we've come at the how and the why of it! And we'll make it harder for men like you *to sell 'em again!* Yo call it infamy? — well, *we* call it detection."

Then rattling on the inner ear came the phrases of the attack which followed on the director of "The People's Banking Association," the injured innocent of as mean a job, as unsavoury a bit of vulturous finance, as had cropped into publicity for many a year — and finally the last dramatic cry:

"But it's noa matter, yo say! Mester Wharton has nobbut played his party and the workin' man a dirty trick or two — *an' yo mun have a gentleman!* Noa — the workin' man isn't fit *himself* to speak wi' his own enemies i' th' gate — *yo mun have a gentleman!* — an' Mester Wharton, he says he'll tak' the post, an' dea his best for yo — an', remember, *yo mun have a gentleman!* Soa now — Yes! or No! — wull yo? — or *woan't yo?*"

And at that, the precipitation of the great unwieldy form half across the table towards Wharton's seat — the roar of the speaker's immediate supporters thrown up against the dead silence of the rest!

As to his own speech — he thought of it with a soreness, a disgust which penetrated to bones and marrow. He had been too desperately taken by surprise — had lost his nerve — missed the right tone throughout. Cool defiance, free self-justification, might have carried him through. Instead of which — faugh!

All this was the phantom-show of a few seconds' thought. He roused himself from a miserable reaction of mind and body to attend to Marcella's question,

"Why did I do it?" he repeated; "why —"

He broke off, pressing both his hands upon his brow. Then he suddenly sat up and pulled himself together.

"Is that tea?" he said, touching the tray. "Will you give me some?"

Marcella went into the back kitchen and called Minta. While the boiling water was brought and the tea was made, Wharton sat forward with his face on his hands and saw nothing. Marcella whispered a word in Minta's ear as she came in. The woman paused, looked at Wharton, whom she had not recognised before in the dark — grew pale — and Marcella saw her hands shaking as she set the tray in order. Wharton knew nothing and thought nothing of Hurd's widow, but to Marcella the juxtaposition of the two figures brought a wave of complex emotion.

Wharton forced himself to eat and drink, hardly speaking the while. Then, when the tremor of sheer exhaustion had to some extent abated, he suddenly realised who this was that was sitting opposite to him ministering to him.

She felt his hand — his quick powerful hand — on hers.

"To *you* I owe the whole truth — let me tell it!"

She drew herself away instinctively — but so softly that he did not realise it. He threw himself back once more in the chair beside her — one knee over the other, the curly head so much younger to-night than the face beneath it supported on his arms, his eyes closed again for rest — and plunged into the story of the *Clarion*.

It was admirably told. He had probably so rehearsed it to himself several times already. He described his action as the result of a double influence working upon him — the influence of his own debts and necessities, and the influence of his growing conviction that the maintenance of the strike had become a blunder, even a misfortune for the people themselves.

"Then — just as I was at my wit's end, conscious besides that the paper was on a wrong line, and must somehow be got out of it — came the overtures from the Syndicate. I knew perfectly well I ought to have refused them — of *course* my whole career was risked by listening to them. But at the same time they gave me assurances that the workpeople would ultimately gain — they proved to me that I was helping to extinguish the trade. As to the *money* — when a great company has to be launched, the people who help it into being get *paid* for it — it is invariable — it happens every day. I like the system no more than you may do — or Wilkins. But consider. I was in such straits that *bankruptcy* lay between me and my political future. Moreover — I had lost nerve, sleep, balance. I was scarcely master of myself when Pearson first broached the matter to me — "

"Pearson!" cried Marcella, involuntarily. She recalled the figure of the solicitor; had heard his name from Frank Leven. She remembered Wharton's impatient words — "There is a tiresome man wants to speak to me on business — "

It was *then!* — that evening! Something sickened her.

Wharton raised himself in his chair and looked at her attentively with his young haggard eyes. In the faint lamplight she was a pale vision of the purest and noblest beauty. But the lofty sadness of her face filled him with a kind of terror. Desire — impotent pain — violent resolve, swept across him. He had come to her, straight from the scene of his ruin, as to the last bulwark left him against a world bent on his destruction, and bare henceforward of all delights.

"Well, what have you to say to me?" he said, suddenly, in a low changed voice — "as I speak — as I look at you — I see in your face that you distrust — that you have judged me; those two men, I suppose, have done their work! Yet from you — *you* of all people — I might look not only for justice — but — I will dare say it — for kindness!"

She trembled. She understood that he appealed to the days at Mellor, and her lips quivered.

"No," she exclaimed, almost timidly — "I try to think the best. I see the pressure was great."

"And consider, please," he said proudly, "what the reasons were for that pressure."

She looked at him interrogatively — a sudden softness in her eyes. If at that moment he had confessed himself fully, if he had thrown himself upon her in the frank truth of his mixed character — and he could have done it, with a Rousseau-like completeness — it is difficult to say what the result of this scene might have been. In the midst of shock and repulsion, she was filled with pity; and there were moments when she was more drawn to his defeat and undoing, than she had ever been to his success.

Yet how question him? To do so, would be to assume a right, which in turn would imply *his* rights. She thought of that mention of "gambling debts," then of his luxurious habits, and extravagant friends. But she was silent. Only, as she sat there opposite to him, one slim hand propping the brow, her look invited him.

He thought he saw his advantage.

"You must remember," he said, with the same self-assertive bearing, "that I have never been a rich man, that my mother spent my father's savings on a score of public objects, that she and I started a number of experiments on the estate, that my expenses as a member of Parliament are very large, and that I spent thousands on building up the *Clarion*. I have been ruined by the *Clarion*, by the cause the *Clarion* supported. I got no help from my party — where was it to come from? They are all poor men. I had to do everything myself, and the struggle has been more than flesh and blood could bear! This year, often, I have not known how to move, to breathe, for anxieties of every sort. Then came the crisis — my work, my usefulness, my career, all threatened. The men who hated me saw their opportunity. I was a fool and gave it them. And my enemies have used it — to the bitter end!"

Tone and gesture were equally insistent and strong. What he was saying to himself was that, with a woman of Marcella's type, one must "bear it out." This moment of wreck was also with him the first moment of all-absorbing and desperate desire. To win her — to wrest her from the Cravens' influence —

that had been the cry in his mind throughout his dazed drive from the House of Commons. Her hand in his — her strength, her beauty, the romantic reputation that had begun to attach to her, at his command — and he would have taken the first step to recovery, he would see his way to right himself.

Ah! but he had missed his chance! Somehow, every word he had been saying rang false to her. She could have thrown herself as a saving angel on the side of weakness and disaster which had spoken its proper language, and with a reckless and confiding truth had appealed to the largeness of a woman's heart. But this patriot — ruined so nobly — for such disinterested purposes — left her cold! She began to think even — hating herself — of the thousands he was supposed to have made in the gambling over that wretched company — no doubt for the "cause" too!

But before she could say a word he was kneeling beside her.

"*Marcella!* give me my answer! — I am in trouble and defeat — be a woman, and come to me!"

He had her hands. She tried to recover them.

"No!" she said, with passionate energy, "*that* is impossible. I had written to you before you came, before I had heard a word of this. Please, *please* let me go!"

"Not till you explain!" — he said, still holding her, and roused to a white heat of emotion — "*why* is it impossible? You said to me once, with all your heart, that you thanked me, that I had taught you, helped you. You cannot ignore the bond between us! And you are free. I have a right to say to you — you

thirst to save, to do good — come and save a man that cries to you! — he confesses to *you*, freely enough, that he has made a hideous mistake — help him to redeem it!"

She rose suddenly with all her strength, freeing herself from him, so that he rose too, and stood glowering and pale.

"When I said that to you," she cried, "I was betraying" — her voice failed her an instant — "we were both false — to the obligation that should have held us — restrained us. No! *no!* I will never be your wife! We should hurt each other — poison each other!"

Her eyes shone with wild tears. As he stood there before her she was seized with a piteous sense of contrast — of the irreparable — of what might have been.

"What do you mean?" he asked her, roughly.

She was silent.

His passion rose.

"Do you remember," he said, approaching her again, "that you have given me cause to hope? It is those two fanatics that have changed you — possessed your mind."

She looked at him with a pale dignity.

"My letters must have warned you," she said simply. "If you had come to-morrow — in prosperity — you would have got the same answer, at once. To-day — now — I have had weak moments, because — because I did not know how to add pain to pain. But they are gone — I see my way! *I do not love you* — that is the simple, the whole truth — I could not follow you!"

He stared at her an instant in a bitter silence.

"I have been warned," — he said slowly, but in truth losing control of himself, "not only by you — and I suppose I understand! You repent last year. Your own letter said as much. You mean to recover the ground — the place you lost. Ah, well! — most natural! — most fitting! When the time comes — and my bones are less sore — I suppose I shall have my second congratulations ready! Meanwhile — "

She gave a low cry and burst suddenly into a passion of weeping, turning her face from him. But when in pale sudden shame he tried to excuse himself — to appease her — she moved away, with a gesture that overawed him.

"*You* have not confessed yourself" — she said, and his look wavered under the significance of hers — "but you drive me to it. Yes, *I repent!*" — her breast heaved, she caught her breath. "I have been trying to cheat myself these last few weeks — to run away from grief — and the other night when you asked me — I would have given all I have and am to feel like any happy girl, who says 'Yes' to her lover. I tried to feel so. But even then, though I was miserable and reckless, I knew in my heart — it was impossible! If you suppose — if you like to suppose — that I — I have hopes or plans — as mean as they would be silly — you must — of course. But I have given no one any *right* to think so or say so. Mr. Wharton — "

Gathering all her self-control, she put out her white hand to him. "Please — please say good-bye to me. It has been hideous vanity — and mistake — and

wretchedness — our knowing each other — from the beginning. I *am* grateful for all you did, I shall always be grateful. I hope — oh! I hope — that — that you will find a way through this trouble. I don't want to make it worse by a word. If I could do anything! But I can't. You must please go. It is late. I wish to call my friend, Mrs. Hurd."

Their eyes met — hers full of a certain stern yet quivering power, his strained and bloodshot, in his lined young face.

Then, with a violent gesture — as though he swept her out of his path — he caught up his hat, went to the door, and was gone.

She fell on her chair almost fainting, and sat there for long in the summer dark, covering her face. But it was not his voice that haunted her ears.

"You have done me wrong — I pray God you may not do yourself a greater wrong in the future!"

Again and again, amid the whirl of memory, she pressed the sad remembered words upon the inward wound and fever — tasting, cherishing the smart of them. And as her trance of exhaustion and despair gradually left her, it was as though she crept close to some dim beloved form in whom her heart knew henceforward the secret and sole companion of its inmost life.

BOOK IV.

"You and I—
Why care by what meanders we are here
I' the centre of the labyrinth? Men have died
Trying to find this place which we have found."

CHAPTER I.

AH! how purely, cleanly beautiful was the autumn sunrise! After her long hardening to the stale noisomeness of London streets, the taint of London air, Marcella hung out of her window at Mellor in a thirsty delight, drinking in the scent of dew and earth and trees, watching the ways of the birds, pouring forth a soul of yearning and of memory into the pearly silence of the morning.

High up on the distant hill to the left, beyond the avenue, the pale apricots and golds of the newly-shorn stubbles caught the mounting light. The beeches of the avenue were turning fast, and the chestnuts girdling the church on her right hand were already thin enough to let the tower show through. That was the bell — the old bell given to the church by Hampden's friend, John Boyce — striking half-past five; and close upon it came the call of a pheasant in the avenue. There he was, fine fellow, with his silly, mincing run, redeemed all at once by the sudden whirr of towering flight.

To-day Mary Harden and the Rector would be at work in the church, and to-morrow was to be the Harvest Festival. Was it two years? — or in an hour or two would she be going with her basket from the Cedar Garden, to find that figure in the brown shooting-coat standing with the Hardens on the altar steps?

Alas! — alas! — her head dropped on her hands as she knelt by the open window. How changed were all the aspects of the world! Three weeks before, the bell in that little church had tolled for one who, in the best way and temper of his own generation, had been God's servant and man's friend — who had been Marcella's friend — and had even, in his last days, on a word from Edward Hallin, sent her an old man's kindly farewell.

"Tell her," Lord Maxwell had written with his own hand to Hallin, "she has taken up a noble work, and will make, I pray God, a noble woman. She had, I think, a kindly liking for an old man, and she will not disdain his blessing."

He had died at Geneva, Aldous and Miss Raeburn with him. For instead of coming home in August, he had grown suddenly worse, and Aldous had gone out to him. They had brought him to the Court for burial, and the new Lord Maxwell, leaving his aunt at the Court, had almost immediately returned to town, — because of Edward Hallin's state of health.

Marcella had seen much of Hallin since he and his sister had come back to London in the middle of August. Hallin's apparent improvement had faded within a week or two of his return to his rooms; Aldous was at Geneva; Miss Hallin was in a panic of alarm; and Marcella found herself both nurse and friend. Day after day she would go in after her nursing rounds, share their evening meal, and either write for Hallin, or help the sister — by the slight extra weight of her professional voice — to keep him from writing and thinking.

He would not himself admit that he was ill at all, and his whole energies at the time were devoted to the preparation of a series of three addresses on the subject of Land Reform, which were to be delivered in October to the delegates of a large number of working-men's clubs from all parts of London. So strong was Hallin's position among working-men reformers, and so beloved had been his personality, that as soon as his position towards the new land nationalising movement, now gathering formidable strength among the London working men, had come to be widely understood, a combined challenge had been sent him by some half-dozen of the leading Socialist and Radical clubs, asking him to give three weekly addresses in October to a congress of London delegates, time to be allowed after the lecture for questions and debate.

Hallin had accepted the invitation with eagerness, and was throwing an intensity of labour into the writing of his three lectures which often seemed to his poor sister to be not only utterly beyond his physical strength, but to carry with it a note as of a last effort, a farewell message, such as her devoted affection could ill endure. For all the time he was struggling with cardiac weakness and brain irritability which would have overwhelmed any one less accustomed to make his account with illness, or to balance against feebleness of body a marvellous discipline of soul.

Lord Maxwell was still alive, and Hallin, in the midst of his work, was looking anxiously for the daily reports from Aldous, living in his friend's life almost as much as in his own — handing on the reports, too,

day by day to Marcella, with a manner which had somehow slipped into expressing a new and sure confidence in her sympathy — when she one evening found Minta Hurd watching for her at the door with a telegram from her mother: "Your father suddenly worse. Please come at once." She arrived at Mellor late that same night.

On the same day Lord Maxwell died. Less than a week later he was buried in the little Gairsley church. Mr. Boyce was then alarmingly ill, and Marcella sat in his darkened room or in her own all day, thinking from time to time of what was passing three miles away — of the great house in its mourning — of the figures round the grave. Hallin, of course, would be there. It was a dripping September day, and she passed easily from moments of passionate yearning and clairvoyance to worry herself about the damp and the fatigue that Hallin must be facing.

Since then she had heard occasionally from Miss Hallin. Everything was much as it had been, apparently. Edward was still hard at work, still ill, still serene. "Aldous" — Miss Hallin could not yet reconcile herself to the new name — was alone in the Curzon Street house, much occupied and harassed apparently by the legal business of the succession, by the election presently to be held in his own constituency, and by the winding-up of his work at the Home Office. He was to resign his under-secretaryship; but with the new session and a certain rearrangement of offices it was probable that he would be brought back into the Ministry. Meanwhile he was constantly with them; and she thought that his interest in Edward's work

and anxiety about his health were perhaps both good for him as helping to throw off something of his own grief and depression.

Whereby it will be noticed that Miss Hallin, like her brother, had by now come to speak intimately and freely to Marcella of her old lover and their friend.

Now for some days, however, she had received no letter from either brother or sister, and she was particularly anxious to hear. For this was the fourth of October, and on the second he was to have delivered the first of his addresses. How had the frail prophet sped? She had her fears. For her weekly "evenings" in Brown's Buildings had shown her a good deal of the passionate strength of feeling developed during the past year in connection with this particular propaganda. She doubted whether the London working man at the present moment was likely to give even Hallin a fair hearing on the point. However, Louis Craven was to be there. And he had promised to write even if Susie Hallin could find no time. Some report ought to reach Mellor by the evening.

Poor Cravens! The young wife, who was expecting a baby, had behaved with great spirit through the *Clarion* trouble; and, selling their bits of furniture to pay their debts, they had gone to lodge near Anthony. Louis had got some odds and ends of designing and artistic work to do through his brother's influence; and was writing where he could, here and there. Marcella had introduced them to the Hallins, and Susie Hallin was taking a motherly interest in the coming child. Anthony, in his gloomy way, was doing all he could for them. But the struggle was

likely to be a hard one, and Marcella had recognised of late that in Louis as in Anthony there were dangerous possibilities of melancholy and eccentricity. Her heart was often sore over their trouble and her own impotence.

Meantime for some wounds, at any rate, time had brought swift cautery! Not three days after her final interview with Wharton, while the catastrophe in the Labour party was still in every one's mouth, and the air was full of bitter speeches and recriminations, Hallin one evening laid down his newspaper with a sudden startled gesture, and then pushed it over to Marcella. There, in the columns devoted to personal news of various sorts, appeared the announcement:

"A marriage has been arranged between Mr. H. S. Wharton, M.P. for West Brookshire, and Lady Selina Farrell, only surviving daughter of Lord Alresford. The ceremony will probably take place somewhere about Easter next. Meanwhile Mr. Wharton, whose health has suffered of late from his exertions in and out of the House, has been ordered to the East for rest by his medical advisers. He and his friend Sir William Ffolliot start for French Cochin China in a few days. Their object is to explore the famous ruined temples of Angkor in Cambodia, and if the season is favourable they may attempt to ascend the Mekong. Mr. Wharton is paired for the remainder of the session."

"Did you know anything of this?" said Hallin, with that careful carelessness in which people dress a dubious question.

"Nothing," she said quietly.

Then an impulse not to be stood against, springing from very mingled depths of feeling, drove her on. She, too, put down the paper, and laying her finger-tips together on her knee she said with an odd slight laugh:

"But I was the last person to know. About a fortnight ago Mr. Wharton proposed to me."

Hallin sprang from his chair, almost with a shout. "And you refused him?"

She nodded, and then was angrily aware that, totally against her will or consent, and for the most foolish and remote reasons, those two eyes of hers had grown moist.

Hallin went straight over to her.

"Do you mind letting me shake hands with you?" he said, half ashamed of his outburst, a dancing light of pleasure transforming the thin face. "There — I am an idiot! We won't say a word more — except about Lady Selina. Have you seen her?"

"Three or four times."

"What is she like?"

Marcella hesitated.

"Is she fat — and forty?" said Hallin, fervently — "Will she beat him?"

"Not at all. She is very thin — thirty-five, elegant, terribly of her own opinion — and makes a great parade of 'papa.'"

She looked round at him, unsteadily, but gaily.

"Oh! I see," said Hallin, with disappointment, "she will only take care he doesn't beat her — which I gather from your manner doesn't matter. And her politics?"

"Lord Alresford was left out of the Ministry," said Marcella slily. "He and Lady Selina thought it a pity."

"Alresford — *Alresford?* Why, of course! He was Lord Privy Seal in their last Cabinet — a narrow-minded old stick! — did a heap of mischief in the Lords. *Well!*" — Hallin pondered a moment — "Wharton will go over!"

Marcella was silent. The tremor of that wrestler's hour had not yet passed away. The girl could find no words in which to discuss Wharton himself, this last amazing act, or its future.

As for Hallin, he sat lost in pleasant dreams of a whitewashed Wharton, comfortably settled at last below the gangway on the Conservative side, using all the old catch-words in slightly different connections, and living gaily on his Lady Selina. Fragments from the talk of Nehemiah — Nehemiah the happy and truculent, that new "scourge of God" upon the parasites of Labour — of poor Bennett, of Molloy, and of various others who had found time to drop in upon him since the Labour smash, kept whirling in his mind. The same prediction he had just made to Marcella was to be discerned in several of them. He vowed to himself that he would write to Raeburn that night, congratulate him and the party on the possibility of so eminent a recruit — and hint another item of news by the way. She had trusted her confidence to him without any pledge — an act for which he paid her well thenceforward, in the coin of a friendship far more intimate, expansive, and delightful than anything his sincerity had as yet allowed him to show her.

But these London incidents and memories, near as they were in time, looked many of them strangely remote to Marcella in this morning silence. When she drew back from the window, after darkening the now sun-flooded room in a very thorough business-like way, in order that she might have four or five hours' sleep, there was something symbolic in the act. She gave back her mind, her self, to the cares, the anxieties, the remorses of the past three weeks. During the night she had been sitting up with her father that her mother might rest. Now, as she lay down, she thought with the sore tension which had lately become habitual to her, of her father's state, her mother's strange personality, her own short-comings.

By the middle of the morning she was downstairs again, vigorous and fresh as ever. Mrs. Boyce's maid was for the moment in charge of the patient, who was doing well. Mrs. Boyce was writing some household notes in the drawing-room. Marcella went in search of her.

The bare room, just as it ever was — with its faded antique charm — looked bright and tempting in the sun. But the cheerfulness of it did but sharpen the impression of that thin form writing in the window. Mrs. Boyce looked years older. The figure had shrunk and flattened into that of an old woman; the hair, which two years before had been still young and abundant, was now easily concealed under the close white cap she had adopted very soon after her daughter had left Mellor. The dress was still exquisitely neat; but plainer and coarser. Only the beautiful hands and

the delicate stateliness of carriage remained — sole relics of a loveliness which had cost its owner few pangs to part with.

Marcella hovered near her — a little behind her — looking at her from time to time with a yearning compunction — which Mrs. Boyce seemed to be aware of, and to avoid.

"Mamma, can't I do those letters for you? I am quite fresh."

"No, thank you. They are just done."

When they were all finished and stamped, Mrs. Boyce made some careful entries in a very methodical account-book, and then got up, locking the drawers of her little writing-table behind her.

"We can keep the London nurse another week I think," she said.

"There is no need," said Marcella, quickly. "Emma and I could divide the nights now and spare you altogether. You see I can sleep at any time."

"Your father seems to prefer Nurse Wenlock," said Mrs. Boyce.

Marcella took the little blow in silence. No doubt it was her due. During the past two years she had spent two separate months at Mellor; she had gone away in opposition to her father's wish; and had found herself on her return more of a stranger to her parents than ever. Mr. Boyce's illness, involving a steady extension of paralytic weakness, with occasional acute fits of pain and danger, had made steady though very gradual progress all the time. But it was not till some days after her return home that Marcella had realised a tenth part of what her mother

had undergone since the disastrous spring of the murder.

She passed now from the subject of the nurse with a half-timid remark about "expense."

"Oh! the expense doesn't matter!" said Mrs. Boyce, as she stood absently before the lately kindled fire, warming her chilled fingers at the blaze.

"Papa is more at ease in those ways?" Marcella ventured. And kneeling down beside her mother she gently chafed one of the cold hands.

"There seems to be enough for what is wanted," said Mrs. Boyce, bearing the chafing with patience. "Your father, I believe, has made great progress this year in freeing the estate. Thank you, my dear. I am not cold now."

And she gently withdrew her hand.

Marcella, indeed, had already noticed that there were now no weeds on the garden-paths, that instead of one gardener there were three, that the old library had been decently patched and restored, that there was another servant, that William, grown into a very tolerable footman, wore a reputable coat, and that a plain but adequate carriage and horse had met her at the station. Her pity even understood that part of her father's bitter resentment of his ever-advancing disablement came from his feeling that here at last — just as death was in sight — he, that squalid failure, Dick Boyce, was making a success of something.

Presently, as she knelt before the fire, a question escaped her, which, when it was spoken, she half regretted.

"Has papa been able to do anything for the cottages yet?"

"I don't think so," said Mrs. Boyce, calmly. After a minute's pause she added, "That will be for your reign, my dear."

Marcella looked up with a sharp thrill of pain.

"Papa is better, mamma, and — and I don't know what you mean. I shall never reign here without you."

Mrs. Boyce began to fidget with the rings on her thin left hand.

"When Mellor ceases to be your father's it will be yours," she said, not without a certain sharp decision; "that was settled long ago. I must be free — and if you are to do anything with this place, you must give your youth and strength to it. And your father is not better — except for the moment. Dr. Clarke exactly foretold the course of his illness to me two years ago, on my urgent request. He may live four months — six, if we can get him to the South. More is impossible."

There was something ghastly in her dry composure. Marcella caught her hand again and leant her trembling young cheek against it.

"I could not live here without you, mamma!"

Mrs. Boyce could not for once repress the inner fever which in general her will controlled so well.

"I hardly think it would matter to you so much, my dear."

Marcella shrank.

"I don't wonder you say that!" she said in a low voice. "Do you think it was all a mistake, mamma, my going away eighteen months ago — a wrong act?"

Mrs. Boyce grew restless.

"I judge nobody, my dear! — unless I am obliged. As you know, I am for liberty — above all" — she spoke with emphasis — "for letting the past alone. But I imagine you must certainly have learnt to do without us. Now I ought to go to your father."

But Marcella held her.

"Do you remember in the *Purgatorio*, mamma, the lines about the loser in the game: 'When the game of dice breaks up, he who lost lingers sorrowfully behind, going over the throws, and *learning by his grief*'? Do you remember?"

Mrs. Boyce looked down upon her, involuntarily a little curious, a little nervous, but assenting. It was one of the inconsistencies of her strange character that she had all her life been a persistent Dante student. The taste for the most strenuous and passionate of poets had developed in her happy youth; it had survived through the loneliness of her middle life. Like everything else personal to herself she never spoke of it; but the little worn books on her table had been familiar to Marcella from a child.

"*E tristo impara?*" repeated Marcella, her voice wavering. "Mamma" — she laid her face against her mother's dress again — "I have lost more throws than you think in the last two years. Won't you believe I may have learnt a little?"

She raised her eyes to her mother's pinched and mask-like face. Mrs. Boyce's lips moved as though she would have asked a question. But she did not ask it. She drew, instead, the stealthy breath Marcella knew well — the breath of one who has measured precisely her own powers of endurance, and will not

risk them for a moment by any digression into alien fields of emotion.

"Well, but one expects persons like you to learn," she said, with a light, cold manner, which made the words mere convention. There was silence an instant; then, probably to release herself, her hand just touched her daughter's hair. "Now, will you come up in half an hour? That was twelve striking, and Emma is never quite punctual with his food."

Marcella went to her father at the hour named. She found him in his wheeled chair, beside a window opened to the sun, and overlooking the Cedar Garden. The room in which he sat was the state bedroom of the old house. It had a marvellous paper of branching trees and parrots and red-robed Chinamen, in the taste of the morning room downstairs, a carved four-post bed, a grate adorned with purplish Dutch tiles, an array of family miniatures over the mantelpiece, and on a neighbouring wall a rack of old swords and rapiers. The needlework hangings of the bed were full of holes; the seats of the Chippendale chairs were frayed or tattered. But, none the less, the inalienable character and dignity of his sleeping-room were a bitter satisfaction to Richard Boyce, even in his sickness. After all said and done, he was king here in his father's and grandfather's place; ruling where they ruled, and — whether they would or no — dying where they died, with the same family faces to bear him witness from the walls, and the same vault awaiting him.

When his daughter entered, he turned his head, and

his eyes, deep and black still as ever, but sunk in a yellow relic of a face, showed a certain agitation. She was disagreeably aware that his thoughts were much occupied with her; that he was full of grievance towards her, and would probably before long bring the pathos of his situation as well as the weight of his dying authority to bear upon her, for purposes she already suspected with alarm.

"Are you a little easier, papa?" she said, as she came up to him.

"I should think as a nurse you ought to know better, my dear, than to ask," he said testily. "When a person is in my condition, enquiries of that sort are a mockery!"

"But one may be in less or more pain," she said gently. "I hoped Dr. Clarke's treatment yesterday might have given you some relief."

He did not vouchsafe an answer. She took some work and sat down by him. Mrs. Boyce, who had been tidying a table of food and medicine, came and asked him if he would be wheeled into another room across the gallery, which had been arranged as a sitting-room. He shook his head irritably.

"I am not fit for it. Can't you see? And I want to speak to Marcella."

Mrs. Boyce went away. Marcella waited, not without a tremor. She was sitting in the sun, her head bent over the muslin strings she was hemming for her nurse's bonnet. The window was wide open; outside, the leaves under a warm breeze were gently drifting down into the Cedar Garden, amid a tangled mass of flowers, mostly yellow or purple. To one

side rose the dark layers of the cedars; to the other, the grey front of the library wing.

Mr. Boyce looked at her with the frown which had now become habitual to him, moved his lips once or twice without speaking; and at last made his effort.

"I should think, Marcella, you must often regret by now the step you took eighteen months ago!"

She grew pale.

"How regret it, papa?" she said, without looking up.

"Why, good God!" he said angrily; "I should think the reasons for regret are plain enough. You threw over a man who was devoted to you, and could have given you the finest position in the county, for the most nonsensical reasons in the world — reasons that by now, I am certain, you are ashamed of."

He saw her wince, and enjoyed his prerogative of weakness. In his normal health he would never have dared so to speak to her. But of late, during long fits of feverish brooding — intensified by her return home — he had vowed to himself to speak his mind.

"Aren't you ashamed of them?" he repeated, as she was silent.

She looked up.

"I am not ashamed of anything I did to save Hurd, if that is what you mean, papa."

Mr. Boyce's anger grew.

"Of course you know what everybody said?"

She stooped over her work again, and did not reply.

"It's no good being sullen over it," he said in exasperation; "I'm your father, and I'm dying. I have a right to question you. It's my duty to see

something settled, if I can, before I go. Is it *true* that all the time you were attacking Raeburn about politics and the reprieve, and what not, you were really behaving as you never ought to have behaved, with Harry Wharton?"

He gave out the words with sharp emphasis, and, bending towards her, he laid an emaciated hand upon her arm.

"What use is there, papa, in going back to these things?" she said, driven to bay, her colour going and coming. "I may have been wrong in a hundred ways, but you never understood that the real reason for it all was that — that — I never was in love with Mr. Raeburn."

"Then why did you accept him?" He fell back against his pillows with a jerk.

"As to that, I will confess my sins readily enough," she said, while her lip trembled, and he saw the tears spring into her eyes. "I accepted him for what you just now called his position in the county, though not quite in that way either."

He was silent a little, then he began again in a voice which gradually became unsteady from self-pity.

"Well, now look here! I have been thinking about this matter a great deal — and God knows I've time to think and cause to think, considering the state I'm in — and I see no reason whatever why I should not try — before I die — to put this thing *straight*. That man was head over ears in love with you, *madly* in love with you. I used to watch him, and I know. Of course you offended and distressed him greatly. He could never have expected such conduct from you

or any one else. But *he's* not the man to change round easily, or to take up with any one else. Now, if you regret what you did or the way in which you did it, why shouldn't I — a dying man may be allowed a little licence I should think! — give him a hint?"

"*Papa!*" cried Marcella, dropping her work, and looking at him with a pale, indignant passion, which a year ago would have quelled him utterly. But he held up his hand.

"Now just let me finish. It would be no good my doing a thing of this kind without saying something to you first, because you'd find it out, and your pride would be the ruin of it. You always had a demoniacal pride, Marcella, even when you were a tiny child; but if you make up your mind now to let me tell him you regret what you did — just that — you'll make him happy, and yourself, for you know very well he's a man of the highest character — and your poor father, who never did *you* much harm anyway!" His voice faltered. "I'd manage it so that there should be nothing humiliating to you in it whatever. As if there could be anything humiliating in confessing such a mistake as that; besides, what is there to be ashamed of? You're no pauper. I've pulled Mellor out of the mud for you, though you and your mother do give me credit for so precious little!"

He lay back, trembling with fatigue, yet still staring at her with glittering eyes, while his hand on the invalid table fixed to the side of his chair shook piteously. Marcella dreaded the effect the whole scene might have upon him; but, now they were in the midst of it, both feeling for herself and prudence

for him drove her into the strongest speech she could devise.

"Papa, if *anything* of that sort were done, I should take care Mr. Raeburn knew I had had nothing to do with it — in such a way that it would be *impossible* for him to carry it further. Dear papa, don't think of such a thing any more. Because I treated Mr. Raeburn unjustly last year, are we now to harass and persecute him? I would sooner disappear from everybody I know — from you and mamma, from England — and never be heard of again."

She stopped a moment — struggling for composure — that she might not excite him too much.

"Besides, it would be absurd! You forget I have seen a good deal of Mr. Raeburn lately — while I have been with the Winterbournes. He has entirely given up all thought of me. Even my vanity could see that plainly enough. His best friends expect him to marry a bright, fascinating little creature of whom I saw a good deal in James Street — a Miss Macdonald."

"Miss how — much?" he asked roughly.

She repeated the name, and then dwelt, with a certain amount of confusion and repetition, upon the probabilities of the matter — half conscious all the time that she was playing a part, persuading herself and him of something she was not at all clear about in her own inner mind — but miserably, passionately determined to go through with it all the same.

He bore with what she said to him, half disappointed and depressed, yet also half incredulous. He had always been obstinate, and the approach of death had emphasised his few salient qualities, as

decay had emphasised the bodily frame. He said to himself stubbornly that he would find some way yet of testing the matter in spite of her. He would think it out.

Meanwhile, step by step, she brought the conversation to less dangerous things, and she was finally gliding into some chat about the Winterbournes when he interrupted her abruptly —

"And that other fellow — Wharton. Your mother tells me you have seen him in London. Has he been making love to you?"

"Suppose I won't be catechised!" she said gaily, determined to allow no more tragedy of any kind. "Besides, papa, you can't read your gossip as good people should. Mr. Wharton's engagement to a certain Lady Selina Farrell — a distant cousin of the Winterbournes — was announced in several papers with great plainness three weeks ago."

At that moment her mother came in, looking anxiously at them both, and half resentfully at Marcella. Marcella, sore and bruised in every moral fibre, got up to go.

Something in the involuntary droop of her beautiful head as she left the room drew her father's eyes after her, and for the time his feeling towards her softened curiously. Well, *she* had not made very much of her life so far! That old strange jealousy of her ability, her beauty, and her social place, he had once felt so hotly, died away. He wished her, indeed, to be Lady Maxwell. Yet for the moment there was a certain balm in the idea that she too — her mother's daughter — with her Merritt blood — could be unlucky.

Marcella went about all day under a vague sense of impending trouble — the result, no doubt, of that intolerable threat of her father's, against which she was, after all, so defenceless.

But whatever it was, it made her all the more nervous and sensitive about the Hallins; about her one true friend, to whom she was slowly revealing herself, even without speech; whose spiritual strength had been guiding and training her; whose physical weakness had drawn to him the maternal, the *spending* instincts which her nursing life had so richly developed.

She strolled down the drive to meet the post. But there were no letters from London, and she came in, inclined to be angry indeed with Louis Craven for deserting her, but saying to herself at the same time that she must have heard if anything had gone wrong.

An hour or so later, just as the October evening was closing in, she was sitting dreaming over a dim wood-fire in the drawing-room. Her father, as might have been expected, had been very tired and comatose all day. Her mother was with him; the London nurse was to sit up, and Marcella felt herself forlorn and superfluous.

Suddenly, in the silence of the house, she heard the front-door bell ring. There was a step in the hall — she sprang up — the door opened, and William, with fluttered emphasis, announced —

"Lord Maxwell!"

In the dusk she could just see his tall form — the short pause as he perceived her — then her hand was in his, and the paralysing astonishment of that first instant had disappeared under the grave emotion of his look.

"Will you excuse me," he said, "for coming at this hour? But I am afraid you have heard nothing yet of our bad news — and Hallin himself was anxious I should come and tell you. Miss Hallin could not write, and Mr. Craven, I was to tell you, had been ill for a week with a chill. You haven't then seen any account of the lecture in the papers?"

"No; I have looked yesterday and to-day in our paper, but there was nothing —"

"Some of the Radical papers reported it. I hoped you might have seen it. But when we got down here this afternoon, and there was nothing from you, both Miss Hallin and Edward felt sure you had not heard — and I walked over. It was a most painful, distressing scene, and he — is very ill."

"But you have brought him to the Court?" she said trembling, lost in the thought of Hallin, her quick breath coming and going. "He was able to bear the journey? Will you tell me? — will you sit down?"

He thanked her hurriedly, and took a seat opposite to her, within the circle of the firelight, so that she saw his deep mourning and the look of repressed suffering.

"The whole thing was extraordinary — I can hardly now describe it," he said, holding his hat in his hands and staring into the fire. "It began excellently. There was a very full room. Bennett was in the chair — and Edward seemed much as usual. He had been looking desperately ill, but he declared that he was sleeping better, and that his sister and I coddled him. Then, — directly he was well started! — I felt somehow that

the audience was very hostile. And *he* evidently felt it more and more. There was a good deal of interruption and hardly any cheers — and I saw after a little — I was sitting not far behind him — that he was discouraged — that he had lost touch. It was presently clear, indeed, that the real interest of the meeting lay not in the least in what he had to say, but in the debate that was to follow. They meant to let him have his hour — but not a minute more. I watched the men about me, and I could see them following the clock — thirsting for their turn. Nothing that he said seemed to penetrate them in the smallest degree. He was there merely as a ninepin to be knocked over. I never saw a meeting so *possessed* with a madness of fanatical conviction — it was amazing!"

He paused, looking sadly before him. She made a little movement, and he roused himself instantly.

"It was just a few minutes before he was to sit down — I was thankful! — when suddenly — I heard his voice change. I do not know now what happened — but I believe he completely lost consciousness of the scene before him — the sense of strain, of exhaustion, of making no way, must have snapped something. He began a sort of confession — a reverie in public — about himself, his life, his thoughts, his prayers, his hopes — mostly his religious hopes — for the working man, for England — I *never* heard anything of the kind from him before — you know his reserve. It was so intimate — so painful — oh! so painful!" — he drew himself together with an involuntary shudder — "before this crowd, this eager hostile crowd which was only pining for him to sit down — to get out of their way. The

men near me began to look at each other and titter. They wondered what he meant by maundering on like that — 'damned canting stuff' — I heard one man near me call it. I tore off a bit of paper, and passed a line to Bennett asking him to get hold of Edward, to stop it. But I think Bennett had rather lost his presence of mind, and I saw him look back at me and shake his head. Then time was up, and they began to shout him down."

Marcella made an exclamation of horror. He turned to her.

"I think it was the most tragic scene I ever saw," he said with a feeling as simple as it was intense. "This crowd so angry and excited — without a particle of understanding or sympathy — laughing, and shouting at him — and he in the midst — white as death — talking this strange nonsense — his voice floating in a high key, quite unlike itself. At last just as I was getting up to go to him, I saw Bennett rise. But we were both too late. He fell at our feet!"

Marcella gave an involuntary sob! "What a horror! she said, "what a martyrdom!"

"It was just that," he answered in a low voice — "It was a martyrdom. And when one thinks of the way in which for years past he has held these big meetings in the hollow of his hand, and now, because he crosses their passion, their whim, — no kindness! — no patience — nothing but a blind hostile fury! Yet *they* thought him a traitor, no doubt. Oh! it was all a tragedy!"

There was silence an instant. Then he resumed:

"We got him into the back room. Luckily there

was a doctor on the platform. It was heart failure, of course, with brain prostration. We managed to get him home, and Susie Hallin and I sat up. He was delirious all night; but yesterday he rallied, and last night he begged us to move him out of London if we could. So we got two doctors and an invalid carriage, and by three this afternoon we were all at the Court. My aunt was ready for him — his sister is there — and a nurse. Clarke was there to meet him. He thinks he cannot possibly live more than a few weeks — possibly even a few days. The shock and strain have been irreparable."

Marcella lay back in her chair, struggling with her grief, her head and face turned away from him, her eyes hidden by her handkerchief. Then in some mysterious way she was suddenly conscious that Aldous was no longer thinking of Hallin, but of her.

"He wants very much to see you," he said, bending towards her; "but I know that you have yourself serious illness to nurse. Forgive me for not having enquired after Mr. Boyce. I trust he is better?"

She sat up, red-eyed, but mistress of herself. The tone had been all gentleness, but to her quivering sense some slight indefinable change — coldness — had passed into it.

"He *is* better, thank you — for the present. And my mother does not let me do very much. We have a nurse too. When shall I come?"

He rose.

"Could you — come to-morrow afternoon? There is to be a consultation of doctors in the morning, which will tire him. About six? — that was what he

said. He is very weak, but in the day quite conscious and rational. My aunt begged me to say how glad she would be —"

He paused. An invincible awkwardness took possession of both of them. She longed to speak to him of his grandfather but could not find the courage.

When he was gone, she, standing alone in the firelight, gave one passionate thought to the fact that so — in this tragic way — they had met again in this room where he had spoken to her his last words as a lover; and then, steadily, she put everything out of her mind but her friend — and death.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Boyce received Marcella's news with more sympathy than her daughter had dared to hope for, and she made no remark upon Aldous himself and his visit, for which Marcella was grateful to her.

As they left the dining-room, after their short evening meal, to go up to Mr. Boyce, Marcella detained her mother an instant.

"Mamma, will you please not tell papa that — that Lord Maxwell came here this afternoon? And will you explain to him why I am going there to-morrow?"

Mrs. Boyce's fair cheek flushed. Marcella saw that she understood.

"If I were you, I should not let your father talk to you any more about those things," she said with a certain proud impatience.

"If I can help it!" exclaimed Marcella. "Will you tell him, mamma, — about Mr. Hallin? — and how good he has been to me?"

Then her voice failed her, and, hurriedly leaving her mother at the top of the stairs, she went away by herself to struggle with a grief and smart almost unbearable.

That night passed quietly at the Court. Hallin was at intervals slightly delirious, but less so than the night before; and in the early morning the young

doctor, who had sat up with him, reported him to Aldous as calmer and a little stronger. But the heart mischief was hopeless, and might bring the bruised life to an end at any moment.

He could not, however, be kept in bed, owing to restlessness and difficulty of breathing, and by midday he was in Aldous's sitting-room, drawn close to the window, that he might delight his eyes with the wide range of wood and plain that it commanded. After a very wet September, the October days were now following each other in a settled and sunny peace. The great woods of the Chilterns, just yellowing towards that full golden moment — short, like all perfection, — which only beeches know, rolled down the hill-slopes to the plain, their curving lines cut here and there by straight fir stems, drawn clear and dark on the pale background of sky and lowland. In the park, immediately below the window, groups of wild cherry and of a slender-leaved maple made spots of "flame and amethyst" on the smooth falling lawns; the deer wandered and fed, and the squirrels were playing and feasting among the beech nuts.

Since Aldous and his poor sister had brought him home from the Bethnal Green hall in which the Land Reform Conference had been held, Hallin had spoken little, except in delirium, and that little had been marked by deep and painful depression. But this morning, when Aldous was summoned by the nurse, and found him propped up by the window, in front of the great view, he saw gracious signs of change. Death, indeed, already in possession, looked from the blue eyes so plainly that Aldous, on his first entrance,

had need of all his own strength of will to keep his composure. But with the certainty of that great release, and with the abandonment of all physical and mental struggle — the struggle of a lifetime — Hallin seemed to-day to have recovered something of his characteristic serenity and blitheness — the temper which had made him the leader of his Oxford contemporaries, and the dear comrade of his friend's life.

When Aldous came in, Hallin smiled and lifted a feeble hand towards the park and the woods.

"Could it have greeted me more kindly," he said, in his whispering voice, "for the end?"

Aldous sat down beside him, pressing his hand, and there was silence till Hallin spoke again.

"You will keep this sitting-room, Aldous?"

"Always."

"I am glad. I have known you in it so long. What good talks we have had here in the old hot days! I was hot, at least, and you bore with me. Land Reform — Church Reform — Wages Reform — we have threshed them all out in this room. Do you remember that night I kept you up till it was too late to go to bed, talking over my Church plans? How full I was of it! — the Church that was to be the people — reflecting their life, their differences — governed by them — growing with them. You wouldn't join it, Aldous — our poor little Association!"

Aldous's strong lip quivered.

"Let me think of something I *did* join in," he said.

Hallin's look shone on him with a wonderful affection.

"Was there anything else you didn't help in? I

don't remember it. I've dragged you into most things. You never minded failure. And I have not had so much of it — not till this last. This has been failure — absolute and complete."

But there was no darkening of expression. He sat quietly smiling.

"Do you suppose anybody who could look beyond the moment would dream of calling it failure?" said Aldous, with difficulty.

Hallin shook his head gently, and was silent for a little time, gathering strength and breath again.

"I ought to suffer" — he said, presently. "Last week I dreaded my own feeling if I should fail or break down — more than the failure itself. But since yesterday — last night — I have no more regrets. I see that my power is gone — that if I were to live I could no longer carry on the battle — or my old life. I am out of touch. Those whom I love and would serve, put me aside. Those who invite me, I do not care to join. So I drop — into the gulf — and the pageant rushes on. But the curious thing is now — I have no suffering. And as to the future — do you remember Jowett in the Introduction to the Phædo —"

He feebly pointed to a book beside him, which Aldous took up. Hallin guided him and he read —

"*Most persons when the last hour comes are resigned to the order of nature and the will of God. They are not thinking of Dante's 'Inferno' or 'Paradiso,' or of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' Heaven and Hell are not realities to them, but words or ideas — the outward symbols of some great mystery, they hardly know what.*"

"It is so with me," said Hallin, smiling, as, at his

gesture, Aldous laid the book aside; "yet not quite. To my *mind*, that mystery indeed is all unknown and dark — but to the heart it seems unveiled — with the heart, I see."

A little later Aldous was startled to hear him say, very clearly and quickly:

"Do you remember that this is the fifth of October?"

Aldous drew his chair closer, that he might not raise his voice.

"Yes, Ned."

"Two years, wasn't it, to-day? Will you forgive me if I speak of her?"

"You shall say anything you will."

"Did you notice that piece of news I sent you, in my last letter to Geneva? But of course you did. Did it please you?"

"Yes, I was glad of it," said Aldous, after a pause, "extremely glad. I thought she had escaped a great danger."

Hallin studied his face closely.

"She is free, Aldous — and she is a noble creature — she has learnt from life — and from death — this last two years. And — you still love her. Is it right to make no more effort?"

Aldous saw the perspiration standing on the wasted brow — would have given the world to be able to content or cheer him — yet would not, for the world, at such a moment be false to his own feeling or deceive his questioner.

"I think it is right," he said deliberately, "— for a good many reasons, Edward. In the first place I

have not the smallest cause — not the fraction of a cause — to suppose that I could occupy with her now any other ground than that I occupied two years ago. She has been kind and friendly to me — on the whole — since we met in London. She has even expressed regret for last year — meaning, of course, as I understood, for the pain and trouble that may be said to have come from her not knowing her own mind. She wished that we should be friends. And" — he turned his head away — "no doubt I could be, in time. . . . But, you see — in all that, there is nothing whatever to bring me forward again. My fatal mistake last year, I think now, lay in my accepting what she gave me — accepting it so readily, so graspingly even. That was my fault, my blindness, and — it was as unjust to her — as it was hopeless for myself. For hers is a nature" — his eyes came back to his friend; his voice took a new force and energy — "which, in love at any rate, will give all or nothing — and will never be happy itself, or bring happiness, till it gives all. That is what last year taught me. So that even if she — out of kindness or remorse for giving pain — were willing to renew the old tie — I should be her worst enemy and my own if I took a single step towards it. Marriage on such terms as I was thankful for last year, would be humiliation to me, and bring no gain to her. It will never serve a man with her" — his voice broke into emotion — "that he should make no claims! Let him claim the uttermost farthing — her whole self. If she gives it, *then* he may know what love means!"

Hallin had listened intently. At Aldous's last

words his expression showed pain and perplexity. His mind was full of vague impressions, memories, which seemed to argue with and dispute one of the chief things Aldous had been saying. But they were not definite enough to be put forward. His sensitive chivalrous sense, even in this extreme weakness, remembered the tragic weight that attaches inevitably to dying words. Let him not do more harm than good.

He rested a little. They brought him food; and Aldous sat beside him making pretence to read, so that he might be encouraged to rest. His sister came and went; so did the doctor. But when they were once more alone, Hallin put out his hand and touched his companion.

"What is it, dear Ned?"

"Only one thing more, before we leave it. Is that *all* that stands between you now — the whole? You spoke to me once in the summer of feeling *angry*, more angry than you could have believed. Of course, I felt the same. But just now you spoke of its all being your fault. Is there anything changed in your mind?"

Aldous hesitated. It was extraordinarily painful to him to speak of the past, and it troubled him that at such a moment it should trouble Hallin.

"There is nothing changed, Ned, except that perhaps time makes *some* difference always. I don't want now" — he tried to smile — "as I did then, to make anybody else suffer for my suffering. But perhaps I marvel even more than I did at first, that — that — she could have allowed some things to happen as she did!"

The tone was firm and vibrating; and, in speaking, the whole face had developed a strong animation most passionate and human.

Hallin sighed.

"I often think," he said, "that she was extraordinarily immature — much more immature than most girls of that age — as to feeling. It was really the brain that was alive."

Aldous silently assented; so much so that Hallin repented himself.

"But not now," he said, in his eager dying whisper; "not now. The plant is growing full and tall, into the richest life."

Aldous took the wasted hand tenderly in his own. There was something inexpressibly touching in this last wrestle of Hallin's affection with another's grief. But it filled Aldous with a kind of remorse, and with the longing to free him from that, as from every other burden, in these last precious hours of life. And at last he succeeded, as he thought, in drawing his mind away from it. They passed to other things. Hallin, indeed, talked very little more during the day. He was very restless and weak, but not in much positive suffering. Aldous read to him at intervals, from Isaiah or Plato, the bright sleepless eyes following every word.

At last the light began to sink. The sunset flooded in from the Berkshire uplands and the far Oxford plain, and lay in gold and purple on the falling woods and the green stretches of the park. The distant edges of hill were extraordinarily luminous and clear, and Aldous, looking into the west with the eye of one

to whom every spot and line were familiar landmarks, could almost fancy he saw beyond the invisible river, the hill, the "lovely tree against the western sky," which keep for ever the memory of one with whose destiny it had often seemed to him that Hallin's had something in common. To him, as to Thyrsis, the same early joy, the same "happy quest," the same "fugitive and gracious light" for guide and beacon, that—

> does not come with houses or with gold,
> With place, with honour and a flattering crew;

and to him, too, the same tasked pipe and tired throat, the same struggle with the "life of men unblest," the same impatient tryst with death.

The lovely lines ran dirge-like in his head, as he sat, sunk in grief, beside his friend. Hallin did not speak; but his eye took note of every change of light, of every darkening tone, as the quiet English scene with its villages, churches, and woods, withdrew itself plane by plane into the evening haze. His soul followed the quiet deer, the homing birds, loosening itself gently the while from pain and from desire, saying farewell to country, to the poor, to the work left undone, and the hopes unrealised — to everything except to love.

It had just struck six when he bent forward to the window beneath which ran the wide front terrace.

"That was her step!" he said, while his face lit up, "will you bring her here?"

Marcella rang the bell at the Court with a fast beating heart. The old butler who came gave what

her shrinking sense thought a forbidding answer to her shy greeting of him, and led her first into the drawing-room. A small figure in deep black rose from a distant chair and came forward stiffly. Marcella found herself shaking hands with Miss Raeburn.

"Will you sit and rest a little before you go upstairs?" said that lady with careful politeness, "or shall I send word at once? He is hardly worse — but as ill as he can be."

"I am not the least tired," said Marcella, and Miss Raeburn rang.

"Tell his lordship, please, that Miss Boyce is here."

The title jarred and hurt Marcella's ear. But she had scarcely time to catch it before Aldous entered, a little bent, as it seemed to her, from his tall erectness, and speaking with an extreme quietness, even monotony of manner.

"He is waiting for you — will you come at once?"

He led her up the central staircase and along the familiar passages, walking silently a little in front of her. They passed the long line of Caroline and Jacobean portraits in the upper gallery, till just outside his own door Aldous paused.

"He ought not to talk long," he said, hesitating, "but you will know — of course — better than any of us."

"I will watch him," she said, almost inaudibly, and he gently opened the door and let her pass, shutting it behind her.

The nurse, who was sitting beside her patient, got up as Marcella entered, and pointed her to a low chair on his further side. Susie Hallin rose too, and kissed

the new-comer hurriedly, absently, without a word, lest she should sob. Then she and the nurse disappeared through an inner door. The evening light was still freely admitted; and there were some candles. By the help of both she could only see him indistinctly. But in her own mind, as she sat down, she determined that he had not even days to live.

Yet as she bent over him she saw a playful gleam on the cavernous face.

"You won't scold me?" said the changed voice — "you did warn me — you and Susie — but — I was obstinate. It was best so!"

She pressed her lips to his hand and was answered by a faint pressure from the cold fingers.

"If I could have been there!" she murmured.

"No — I am thankful you were not. And I must not think of it — or of any trouble. Aldous is very bitter — but he will take comfort by and by — he will see it — and them — more justly. They meant me no unkindness. They were full of an idea, as I was. When I came back to myself — first — all was despair. I was in a blank horror of myself and life. Now it has gone — I don't know how. It is not of my own will — some hand has lifted a weight. I seem to float — without pain."

He closed his eyes, gathering strength again in the interval, by a strong effort of will — calling up in the dimming brain what he had to say. She meanwhile spoke to him in a low voice, mainly to prevent his talking, telling him of her father, of her mother's strain of nursing — of herself — she hardly knew what. How grotesque to be giving him these little bits of

news about strangers — to him, this hovering, consecrated soul, on the brink of the great secret!

In the intervals, while he was still silent, she could not sometimes prevent the pulse of her own life from stirring. Her eye wandered round the room — Aldous's familiar room. There, on the writing-table with its load of letters and books, stood the photograph of Hallin; another, her own, used to stand beside it; it was solitary now.

Otherwise, all was just as it had been — flowers, books, newspapers — the signs of familiar occupation, the hundred small details of character and personality which in estrangement take to themselves such a smarting significance for the sad and craving heart. The date — the anniversary — echoed in her mind.

Then, with a rush of remorseful pain, her thoughts came back to the present and to Hallin. At the same moment she saw that his eyes were open, and fixed upon her with a certain anxiety and expectancy. He made a movement as though to draw her towards him; and she stooped to him.

"I feel," he said, "as though my strength were leaving me fast. Let me ask you one question — because of my love for you — and *him*. I have fancied — of late — things were changed. Can you tell me — will you? — or is it unfair?" — the words had all their bright, natural intonation — "Is your heart — still where it was? — or, could you ever — undo the past —"

He held her fast, grasping the hand she had given him with unconscious force. She had looked up startled, her lip trembling like a child's. Then she

dropped her head against the arm of her chair, as though she could not speak.

He moved restlessly, and sighed.

"I should not," he said to himself; "I should not — it was wrong. The dying are tyrannous."

He even began a word of sweet apology. But she shook her head.

"Don't!" she said, struggling with herself; "don't say that! It would do me good to speak — to you — "

An exquisite smile dawned on Hallin's face.

"Then!" — he said — "confess!"

A few minutes later they were still sitting together. She strongly wished to go; but he would not yet allow it. His face was full of a mystical joy — a living faith, which must somehow communicate itself in one last sacramental effort.

"How strange that you — and I — and he — should have been so mixed together in this queer life. Now I seem to regret nothing — I *hope* everything. One more little testimony let me bear! — the last. We disappear one by one — into the dark — but each may throw his comrades — a token — before he goes. You have been in much trouble of mind and spirit — I have seen it. Take my poor witness. There is one clue, one only — *goodness — the surrendered will.* Everything is there — all faith — all religion — all hope for rich or poor. — Whether we feel our way through consciously to the Will — that asks our will — matters little. Aldous and I have differed much on this — in words — never at heart! I could use words, symbols

he cannot — and they have given me peace. But half my best life I owe to him."

At this he made a long pause — but, still, through that weak grasp, refusing to let her go — till all was said. Day was almost gone; the stars had come out over the purple dusk of the park.

"That Will — we reach — through duty and pain," he whispered at last, so faintly she could hardly hear him, "is the root, the source. It leads us in living — it — carries us in death. But our weakness and vagueness — want help — want the human life and voice — to lean on — to drink from. We Christians — are orphans — without Christ! There again — what does it matter what we think — *about* him — if only we think — *of* him. In *one* such life are all mysteries, and all knowledge — and our fathers have chosen for us — "

The insistent voice sank lower and lower into final silence — though the lips still moved. The eyelids too fell. Miss Hallin and the nurse came in. Marcella rose and stood for one passionate instant looking down upon him. Then, with a pressure of the hand to the sister beside her, she stole out. Her one prayer was that she might see and meet no one. So soft was her step that even the watching Aldous did not hear her. She lifted the heavy latch of the outer door without the smallest noise, and found herself alone in the starlight.

After Marcella left him, Hallin remained for some hours in what seemed to those about him a feverish trance. He did not sleep, but he showed no sign

of responsive consciousness. In reality his mind all through was full of the most vivid though incoherent images and sensations. But he could no longer distinguish between them and the figures and movements of the real people in his room. Each passed into and intermingled with the other. In some vague, eager way he seemed all the time to be waiting or seeking for Aldous. There was the haunting impression of some word to say — some final thing to do — which would not let him rest. But something seemed always to imprison him, to hold him back, and the veil between him and the real Aldous watching beside him grew ever denser.

At night they made no effort to move him from the couch and the half-sitting posture in which he had passed the day. Death had come too near. His sister and Aldous and the young doctor who had brought him from London watched with him. The curtains were drawn back from both the windows, and in the clearness of the first autumnal frost a crescent moon hung above the woods, the silvery lawns, the plain.

Not long after midnight Hallin seemed to himself to wake, full of purpose and of strength. He spoke, as he thought, to Aldous, asking to be alone with him. But Aldous did not move; that sad watching gaze of his showed no change. Then Hallin suffered a sudden sharp spasm of anguish and of struggle. Three words to say — only three words; but those he *must* say! He tried again, but Aldous's dumb grief still sat motionless. Then the thought leapt in the ebbing sense, "Speech is gone; I shall speak no more!"

It brought with it a stab, a quick revolt. But

something checked both, and in a final offering of the soul, Hallin gave up his last desire.

What Aldous saw was only that the dying man opened his hand as though it asked for that of his friend. He placed his own within those seeking fingers, and Hallin's latest movement — which death stopped half-way — was to raise it to his lips.

So Marcella's confession — made in the abandonment, the blind passionate trust, of a supreme moment — bore no fruit. It went with Hallin to the grave.

CHAPTER III.

"I THINK I saw the letters arrive," said Mrs. Boyce to her daughter. "And Donna Margherita seems to be signalling to us."

"Let me go for them, mamma."

"No, thank you, I must go in."

And Mrs. Boyce rose from her seat, and went slowly towards the hotel. Marcella watched her widow's cap and black dress as they passed along the *pergola* of the hotel garden, between bright masses of geraniums and roses on either side.

They had been sitting in the famous garden of the Cappucini Hotel at Amalfi. To Marcella's left, far below the high terrace of the hotel, the green and azure of the Salernian gulf shone and danced in the sun, to her right a wood of oak and arbutus stretched up into a purple cliff — a wood starred above with gold and scarlet berries, and below with cyclamen and narcissus. From the earth under the leafy oaks — for the oaks at Amalfi lose and regain their foliage in winter and spring by imperceptible gradations — came a moist English smell. The air was damp and warm. A convent bell tolled from invisible heights above the garden; while the olives and vines close at hand were full of the chattering voices of gardeners and children, and broken here and there by clouds of

pink almond-blossom. March had just begun, and the afternoons were fast lengthening. It was little more than a fortnight since Mr. Boyce's death. In the November of the preceding year Mrs. Boyce and Marcella had brought him to Naples by sea, and there, at a little villa on Posilippo, he had drawn sadly to his end. It had been a dreary time, from which Marcella could hardly hope that her mother would ever fully recover. She herself had found in the long months of nursing — nursing of which, with quiet tenacity, she had gradually claimed and obtained her full share — a deep moral consolation. They had paid certain debts to conscience, and they had for ever enshrined her father's memory in the silence of an unmeasured and loving pity.

But the wife? Marcella sorely recognised that to her mother these last days had brought none of the soothing, reconciling influences they had involved for herself. Between the husband and wife there had been dumb friction and misery — surely also a passionate affection! — to the end. The invalid's dependence on her had been abject, her devotion wonderful. Yet, in her close contact with them, the daughter had never been able to ignore the existence between them of a wretched though tacit debate — reproach on his side, self-defence or spasmodic effort on hers — which seemed to have its origin deep in the past, yet to be stimulated afresh by a hundred passing incidents of the present. Under the blight of it, as under the physical strain of nursing, Mrs. Boyce had worn and dwindled to a white-haired shadow; while he had both clung to life and feared death more than would

normally have been the case. At the end he had died in her arms, his head on her breast; she had closed his eyes and performed every last office without a tear; nor had Marcella ever seen her weep from then till now. The letters she had received, mostly, Marcella believed, from her own family, remained unopened in her travelling-bag. She spoke very little, and was constantly restless, nor could Marcella as yet form any idea of the future.

After the funeral at Naples Mrs. Boyce had written immediately to her husband's solicitor for a copy of his will and a statement of affairs. She had then allowed herself to be carried off to Amalfi, and had there, while entirely declining to admit that she was ill, been clearly doing her best to recover health and nerve sufficient to come to some decision, to grapple with some crisis which Marcella also felt to be impending — though as to why it should be impending, or what the nature of it might be, she could only dread and guess.

There was much bitter yearning in the girl's heart as she sat, breathed on by the soft Italian wind blowing from this enchanted sea. The inner cry was that her mother did not love her, had never loved her, and might even now — weird, incredible thought! — be planning to desert her. Hallin was dead — who else was there that cared for her or thought of her? Betty Macdonald wrote often, wild, "*schwärmerisch*" letters. Marcella looked for them with eagerness, and answered them affectionately. But Betty must soon marry, and then all that would be at an end. Meanwhile Marcella knew well it was Betty's news that made Betty's adoration doubly

welcome. Aldous Raeburn — she never did or could think of him under his new name — was apparently in London, much occupied in politics, and constantly, as it seemed, in Betty's society. What likelihood was there that her life and his would ever touch again? She thought often of her confession to Hallin, but in great perplexity of feeling. She had, of course, said no word of secrecy to him at the time. Such a demand in a man's last hour would have been impossible. She had simply followed a certain mystical love and obedience in telling him what he asked to know, and in the strong spontaneous impulse had thought of nothing beyond. Afterwards her pride had suffered fresh martyrdom. Could he, with his loving instinct, have failed to give his friend some sign? If so, it had been unwelcome, for since the day of Hallin's funeral she and Aldous had been more complete strangers than before. Lady Winterbourne, Betty, Frank Leven, had written since her father's death; but from him, nothing.

By the way, Frank Leven had succeeded at Christmas, by old Sir Charles Leven's unexpected death, to the baronetcy and estates. How would that affect his chances with Betty? — if indeed there were any such chances left.

As to her own immediate future, Marcella knew from many indications that Mellor would be hers at once. But in her general tiredness of mind and body she was far more conscious of the burden of her inheritance than of its opportunities. All that vivid castle-building gift which was specially hers, and would revive, was at present in abeyance. 'She had pined once for

power and freedom, that she might make a Kingdom of Heaven of her own, quickly. Now power and freedom, up to a certain point, were about to be put into her hands; and instead of plans for acting largely and bountifully on a plastic outer world, she was saying to herself, hungrily, that unless she had something close to her to love and live for, she could do nothing. If her mother would end these unnatural doubts, if she would begin to make friends with her own daughter, and only yield herself to be loved and comforted, why *then* it might be possible to think of the village and the straw-plaiting! Otherwise — the girl's attitude as she sat dreaming in the sun showed her despondency.

She was roused by her mother's voice calling her from the other end of the *pergola.*

"Yes, mamma."

"Will you come in? There are some letters."

"It is the will," thought Marcella, as Mrs. Boyce turned back to the hotel, and she followed.

Mrs. Boyce shut the door of their sitting-room, and then went up to her daughter with a manner which suddenly struck and startled Marcella. There was natural agitation and trouble in it.

"There is something in the will, Marcella, which will, I fear, annoy and distress you. Your father inserted it without consulting me. I want to know what you think ought to be done. You will find that Lord Maxwell and I have been appointed joint executors."

Marcella turned pale.

"Lord Maxwell!" she said, bewildered. "*Lord Maxwell — Aldous!* What do you mean, mamma?"

Mrs. Boyce put the will into her hands, and, pointing the way among the technicalities she had been perusing while Marcella was still lingering in the garden, showed her the paragraph in question. The words of the will were merely formal: "I hereby appoint," &c., and no more; but in a communication from the family solicitor, Mr. French, which Mrs. Boyce silently handed to her daughter after she had read the legal disposition, the ladies were informed that Mr. Boyce had, before quitting England, written a letter to Lord Maxwell, duly sealed and addressed, with instructions that it should be forwarded to its destination immediately after the writer's burial. "Those instructions," said Mr. French, "I have carried out. I understand that Lord Maxwell was not consulted as to his appointment as executor prior to the drawing up of the will. But you will no doubt hear from him at once, and as soon as we know that he consents to act, we can proceed immediately to probate."

"Mamma, how *could* he?" said Marcella, in a low, suffocated voice, letting will and letter fall upon her knee.

"Did he give you no warning in that talk you had with him at Mellor?" said Mrs. Boyce, after a minute's silence.

"Not the least," said Marcella, rising restlessly and beginning to walk up and down. "He spoke to me about wishing to bring it on again—asked me to let him write. I told him it was all done with—for ever! As to my own feelings, I felt it was no use to speak of them; but I thought—I *believed* I had

proved to him that Lord Maxwell had absolutely given up all idea of such a thing; and that it was already probable he would marry some one else. I told him I would rather disappear from every one I knew than consent to it — he could only humiliate us all by saying a word. And *now*, after that! — "

She stopped in her restless walk, pressing her hands miserably together.

"What *does* he want with us and our affairs?" she broke out. "He wishes, of course, to have no more to do with me. And now we force him — *force* him into these intimate relations. What can papa have said in that letter to him? What *can* he have said? Oh! it is unbearable! Can't we write at once?"

She pressed her hands over her eyes in a passion of humiliation and disgust. Mrs. Boyce watched her closely.

"We must wait, anyway, for his letter," she said. "It ought to be here by to-morrow morning."

Marcella sank on a chair by an open glass door, her eyes wandering, through the straggling roses growing against the wall of the stone balcony outside, to the laughing purples and greens of the sea.

"Of course," she said unhappily, "it is most probable he will consent. It would not be like him to refuse. But, mamma, you must write. *I* must write and beg him not to do it. It is quite simple. We can manage everything for ourselves. Oh! how *could* papa?" she broke out again in a low wail, "how could he?"

Mrs. Boyce's lips tightened sharply. It seemed to

her a foolish question. *She*, at least, had had the experience of twenty years out of which to answer it. Death had made no difference. She saw her husband's character and her own seared and broken life with the same tragical clearness; she felt the same gnawing of an affection not to be plucked out while the heart still beat. This act of indelicacy and injustice was like many that had gone before it; and there was in it the same evasion and concealment towards herself. No matter. She had made her account with it all twenty years before. What astonished her was, that the force of her strong coercing will had been able to keep him for so long within the limits of the smaller and meaner immoralities of this world.

"Have you read the rest of the will?" she asked, after a long pause.

Marcella lifted it again, and began listlessly to go through it.

"Mamma!" she said presently, looking up, the colour flushing back into her face, "I find no mention of you in it throughout. There seems to be no provision for you."

"There is none," said Mrs. Boyce, quietly. "There was no need. I have my own income. We lived upon it for years before your father succeeded to Mellor. It is therefore amply sufficient for me now."

"You cannot imagine," cried Marcella, trembling in every limb, "that I am going to take the whole of my father's estate, and leave nothing — *nothing* for his wife. It would be impossible — unseemly. It would be to do *me* an injustice, mamma, as well as yourself," she added proudly.

"No, I think not," said Mrs. Boyce, with her usual cold absence of emotion. "You do not yet understand the situation. Your father's misfortunes nearly ruined the estate for a time. Your grandfather went through great trouble, and raised large sums to — " she paused for the right phrase — "to free us from the consequences of your father's actions. I benefited, of course, as much as he did. Those sums crippled all your grandfather's old age. He was a man to whom I was attached — whom I respected. Mellor, I believe, had never been embarrassed before. Well, your uncle did a little towards recovery — but on the whole he was a fool. Your father has done much more, and you, no doubt, will complete it. As for me, I have no claim to anything more from Mellor. The place itself is" — again she stopped for a word of which the energy, when it came, seemed to escape her — "hateful to me. I shall feel freer if I have no tie to it. And at last I persuaded your father to let me have my way."

Marcella rose from her seat impetuously, walked quickly across the room, and threw herself on her knees beside her mother.

"Mamma, are you still determined — now that we two are alone in the world — to act towards me, to treat me as though I were not your daughter — not your child at all, but a stranger?"

It was a cry of anguish. A sudden slight tremor swept over Mrs. Boyce's thin and withered face. She braced herself to the inevitable.

"Don't let us make a tragedy of it, my dear," she said, with a light touch on Marcella's hands. "Let

us discuss it reasonably. Won't you sit down? I am not proposing anything very dreadful. But, like you, I have some interests of my own, and I should be glad to follow them — now — a little. I wish to spend some of the year in London; to make that, perhaps, my headquarters, so as to see something of some old friends whom I have had no intercourse with for years — perhaps also of my relations." She spoke of them with a particular dryness. "And I should be glad — after this long time — to be somewhat taken out of oneself, to read, to hear what is going on, to feed one's mind a little."

Marcella, looking at her, saw a kind of feverish light, a sparkling intensity in the pale blue eyes, that filled her with amazement. What, after all, did she know of this strange individuality from which her own being had taken its rise? The same flesh and blood — what an irony of nature!

"Of course," continued Mrs. Boyce, "I should go to you, and you would come to me. It would only be for part of the year. Probably we should get more from each other's lives so. As you know, I long to see things as they are, not conventionally. Anyway, whether I were there or no, you would probably want some companion to help you in your work and plans. I am not fit for them. And it would be easy to find some one who could act as chaperon in my absence."

The hot tears sprang to Marcella's eyes. "Why did you send me away from you, mamma, all my childhood," she cried. "It was wrong — cruel. I have no brother or sister. And you put me out of your life when I had no choice, when I was too young to understand."

Mrs. Boyce winced, but made no reply. She sat with her delicate hand across her brow. She was the white shadow of her former self; but her fragility had always seemed to Marcella more indomitable than anybody else's strength.

Sobs began to rise in Marcella's throat.

"And now," she said, in half-coherent despair, "do you know what you are doing? You are cutting yourself off from me — refusing to have any real bond to me just when I want it most. I suppose you think that I shall be satisfied with the property and the power, and the chance of doing what I like. But" — she tried her best to gulp back her pain, her outraged feeling, to speak quietly — "I am not like that really any more. I can take it all up, with courage and heart, if you will stay with me, and let me — let me — love you and care for you. But, by myself, I feel as if I could not face it! I am not likely to be happy — for a long time — except in doing what work I can. It is very improbable that I shall marry. I dare say you don't believe me, but it is true. We are both sad and lonely. We have no one but each other. And then you talk in this ghastly way of separating from me — casting me off."

Her voice trembled and broke, she looked at her mother with a frowning passion.

Mrs. Boyce still sat silent, studying her daughter with a strange, brooding eye. Under her unnatural composure there was in reality a half-mad impatience, the result of physical and moral reaction. This beauty, this youth, talk of sadness, of finality! What folly! Still, she was stirred, undermined in spite of herself.

"There!" she said, with a restless gesture, "let us, please, talk of it no more. I will come back with you —I will do my best. We will let the matter of my future settlement alone for some months, at any rate, if that will satisfy you or be any help to you."

She made a movement as though to rise from her low chair. But the great waters swelled in Marcella — swelled and broke. She fell on her knees again by her mother, and before Mrs. Boyce could stop her she had thrown her young arms close round the thin, shrunken form.

"Mother!" she said. "Mother, be good to me — love me — you are all I have!"

And she kissed the pale brow and cheek with a hungry, almost a violent tenderness that would not be gainsaid, murmuring wild incoherent things.

Mrs. Boyce first tried to put her away, then submitted, being physically unable to resist, and at last escaped from her with a sudden sob that went to the girl's heart. She rose, went to the window, struggled hard for composure, and finally left the room.

But that evening, for the first time, she let Marcella put her on the sofa, tend her, and read to her. More wonderful still, she went to sleep while Marcella was reading. In the lamplight her face looked piteously old and worn. The girl sat for long with her hands clasped round her knees, gazing down upon it, in a trance of pain and longing.

Marcella was awake early next morning, listening to the full voice of the sea as it broke three hundred feet below, against the beach and rocky walls of the

little town. She was lying in a tiny white room, one of the cells of the old monastery, and the sun as it rose above the Salernian mountains — the mountains that hold Pæstum in their blue and purple shadows — danced in gold on the white wall. The bell of the cathedral far below tolled the hour. She supposed it must be six o'clock. Two hours more or so, and Lord Maxwell's letter might be looked for.

She lay and thought of it — longed for it, and for the time of answering it, with the same soreness that had marked all the dreams of a restless night. If she could only see her father's letter! It was inconceivable that he should have mentioned *her* name in his plea. He might have appealed to the old friendship between the families. That was possible, and would have, at any rate, an *appearance* of decency. But who could answer for it — or for him? She clasped her hands rigidly behind her head, her brows frowning, bending her mind with an intensity of will to the best means of assuring Aldous Raeburn that she and her mother would not encroach upon him. She had a perpetual morbid vision of herself as the pursuer, attacking him now through his friend, now through her father. Oh! when would that letter come, and let her write her own!

She tried to read, but in reality listened for every sound of awakening life in the hotel. When at last her mother's maid came in to call her, she sprang up with a start.

"Deacon, are the letters come?"

"There are two for your mother, miss; none for you."

Marcella threw on her dressing-gown, watched her opportunity, and slipped in to her mother, who occupied a similar cell next door.

Mrs. Boyce was sitting up in bed, with a letter before her, her pale blue eyes fixed absently on the far stretch of sea.

She looked round with a start as Marcella entered. "The letter is to me, of course," she said.

Marcella read it breathlessly.

"Dear Mrs. Boyce, — I have this morning received from your solicitor, Mr. French, a letter written by Mr. Boyce to myself in November of last year. In it he asks me to undertake the office of executor, to which, I hear from Mr. French, he has named me in his will. Mr. French also enquires whether I shall be willing to act, and asks me to communicate with you.

"May I, then, venture to intrude upon you with these few words? Mr. Boyce refers in his touching letter to the old friendship between our families, and to the fact that similar offices have often been performed by his relations for mine, or *vice versâ*. But no reminder of the kind was in the least needed. If I can be of any service to yourself and to Miss Boyce, neither your poor husband nor you could do me any greater kindness than to command me.

"I feel naturally some diffidence in the matter. I gather from Mr. French that Miss Boyce is her father's heiress, and comes at once into the possession of Mellor. She may not, of course, wish me to act, in which case I should withdraw immediately; but I sincerely trust that she will not forbid me the very small service I could so easily and gladly render.

"I cannot close my letter without venturing to express the deep sympathy I have felt for you and yours during the past six months. I have been far from forgetful of all that you have been going through, though I may have seemed so. I trust that you and your daughter will not hurry home for any business cause, if it is still best for your health to stay in Italy. With your instructions Mr. French and I could arrange everything.

"Believe me,

"Yours most sincerely,

"MAXWELL."

"You will find it difficult, my dear, to write a snub in answer to that letter," said Mrs. Boyce, drily, as Marcella laid it down.

Marcella's face was, indeed, crimson with perplexity and feeling.

"Well, we can think it over," she said as she went away.

Mrs. Boyce pondered the matter a good deal when she was left alone. The signs of reaction and change in Marcella were plain enough. What they precisely meant, and how much, was another matter. As to him, Marcella's idea of another attachment might be true, or might be merely the creation of her own irritable pride. Anyway, he was in the mood to write a charming letter. Mrs. Boyce's blanched lip had all its natural irony as she thought it over. To her mind Aldous Raeburn's manners had always been a trifle too good, whether for his own interests or for this wicked world. And if he had any idea now of trying again,

let him, for Heaven's sake, not be too yielding or too eager! "It was always the way," thought Mrs. Boyce, remembering a child in white frock and baby shoes — "if you wished to make her want anything, you had to take it away from her."

Meanwhile the mere thought that matters might even yet so settle themselves drew from the mother a long breath of relief. She had spent an all but sleepless night, tormented by Marcella's claim upon her. After twenty years of self-suppression this woman of forty-five, naturally able, original, and independent, had seen a glimpse of liberty. In her first youth she had been betrayed as a wife, degraded as a member of society. A passion she could not kill, combined with some stoical sense of inalienable obligation, had combined to make her both the slave and guardian of her husband up to middle life; and her family and personal pride, so strong in her as a girl, had found its only outlet in this singular estrangement she had achieved between herself and every other living being, including her own daughter. Now her husband was dead, and all sorts of crushed powers and desires, mostly of the intellectual sort, had been strangely reviving within her. Just emerged, as she was, from the long gloom of nursing, she already wished to throw it all behind her — to travel, to read, to make acquaintances — she who had lived as a recluse for twenty years! There was in it a last clutch at youth, at life. And she had no desire to enter upon this new existence — in comradeship with Marcella. They were independent and very different human beings. That they were mother and daughter was a mere physical accident.

Moreover, though she was amply conscious of the fine development in Marcella during the past two years, it is probable that she felt her daughter even less congenial to her now than of old. For the rich, emotional nature had, as we have seen, "suffered conviction," had turned in the broad sense to "religion," was more and more sensitive, especially since Hallin's death, to the spiritual things and symbols in the world. At Naples she had haunted churches; had read, as her mother knew, many religious books.

Now Mrs. Boyce in these matters had a curious history. She had begun life as an ardent Christian, under evangelical influences. Her husband, on the other hand, at the time she married him was a man of purely sceptical opinions, a superficial disciple of Mill and Comte, and fond of an easy profanity which seemed to place him indisputably with the superior persons of this world. To the amazement and scandal of her friends, Evelyn Merritt had not been three months his wife before she had adopted his opinions *en bloc*, and was carrying them out to their logical ends with a sincerity and devotion quite unknown to her teacher. Thenceforward her conception of things — of which, however, she seldom spoke — had been actively and even vehemently rationalist; and it had been one of the chief sorenesses and shames of her life at Mellor that, in order to suit his position as country squire, Richard Boyce had sunk to what, in her eyes, were a hundred mean compliances with things orthodox and established.

Then, in his last illness, he had finally broken away from her, and his own past. "Evelyn, I should like

to see a clergyman," he had said to her in his piteous voice, "and I shall ask him to give me the Sacrament." She had made every arrangement accordingly; but her bitter soul could see nothing in the step but fear and hypocrisy; and he knew it. And as he lay talking alone with the man whom they had summoned, two or three nights before the end, she, sitting in the next room, had been conscious of a deep and smarting jealousy. Had not the hard devotion of twenty years made him at least her own? And here was this black-coated reciter of incredible things stepping into her place. Only in death she recovered him wholly. No priest interfered while he drew his last breath upon her bosom.

And now Marcella! Yet the girl's voice and plea tugged at her withered heart. She felt a dread of unknown softnesses — of being invaded and weakened by things in her akin to her daughter, and so captured afresh. Her mind fell upon the bare idea of a revival of the Maxwell engagement, and caressed it.

Meanwhile Marcella stood dressing by the open window in the sunlight, which filled the room with wavy reflections caught from the sea. Fishing-boats were putting off from the beach, three hundred feet below her; she could hear the grating of the keels, the songs of the boatmen. On the little breakwater to the right an artist's white umbrella shone in the sun; and a half-naked boy, poised on the bows of a boat moored beside the painter, stood bent in the eager attitude of one about to drop the bait into the blue wave below. His brown back burnt against the water. Cliff, houses, sea, glowed in warmth and light;

the air was full of roses and orange-blossom; and to an English sense had already the magic of summer.

And Marcella's hands, as she coiled and plaited her black hair, moved with a new lightness; for the first time since her father's death her look had its normal fire, crossed every now and then by something that made her all softness and all woman. No! as her mother said, one could not snub that letter or its writer. But how to answer it! In imagination she had already penned twenty different replies. How not to be grasping or effusive, and yet to show that you could feel and repay kindness — there was the problem!

Meanwhile, from that letter, or rather in subtle connection with it, her thoughts at last went wandering off with a natural zest to her new realm of Mellor, and to all that she would and could do for the dwellers therein.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a bleak east-wind day towards the end of March. Aldous was at work in the library at the Court, writing at his grandfather's table, where in general he got through his estate and county affairs, keeping his old sitting-room upstairs for the pursuits that were more particularly his own.

All the morning he had been occupied with a tedious piece of local business, wading through endless documents concerning a dispute between the head-master of a neighbouring grammar-school and his governing body, of which Aldous was one. The affair was difficult, personal, odious. To have wasted nearly three hours upon it was, to a man of Aldous's type, to have lost a day. Besides he had not his grandfather's knack in such things, and was abundantly conscious of it.

However, there it was, a duty which none but he apparently could or would do, and he had been wrestling with it. With more philosophy than usual, too, since every tick of the clock behind him bore him nearer to an appointment which, whatever it might be, would not be tedious.

At last he got up and went to the window to look at the weather. A cutting wind, clearly, but no rain. Then he walked into the drawing-room, calling for his

aunt. No one was to be seen, either there or in the conservatory, and he came back to the library and rang..

"Roberts, has Miss Raeburn gone out?"

"Yes, my lord," said the old butler addressed. "She and Miss Macdonald have gone out driving, and I was to tell your lordship that Miss Raeburn would drop Miss Macdonald at Mellor on her way home."

"Is Sir Frank anywhere about?"

"He was in the smoking-room a little while ago, my lord."

"Will you please try and find him?"

"Yes, my lord."

Aldous's mouth twitched with impatience as the old servant shut the door.

"How many times did Roberts manage to be-lord me in a minute?" he asked himself; "yet if I were to remonstrate, I suppose I should only make him unhappy."

And walking again to the window, he thrust his hands into his pockets and stood looking out with a far from cheerful countenance.

One of the things that most tormented him indeed in this recent existence was a perpetual pricking sense of the contrast between this small world of his ancestral possessions and traditions, with all its ceremonial and feudal usage, and the great rushing world outside it of action and of thought. Do what he would, he could not un-king himself within the limits of the Maxwell estate. To the people living upon it he was the man of most importance within their ken, was inevitably their potentate and earthly providence. He confessed that there

was a real need of him, if he did his duty. But on this need the class-practice of generations had built up a deference, a sharpness of class-distinction, which any modern must find more and more irksome in proportion to his modernness. What was in Aldous's mind, as he stood with drawn brows looking out over the view which showed him most of his domain, was a sort of hot impatience of being made day by day, in a hundred foolish ways, to play at greatness.

Yet, as we know, he was no democrat by conviction, had no comforting faith in what seemed to him the rule of a multitudinous ignorance. Still every sane man of to-day knows, at any rate, that the world has taken the road of democracy, and that the key to the future, for good or ill, lies not in the revolts and speculations of the cultivated few, but in the men and movements that can seize the many. Aldous's temper was despondently critical towards the majority of these, perhaps; he had, constitutionally, little of that poet's sympathy with the crowd, as such, which had given Hallin his power. But, at any rate, they filled the human stage — these men and movements — and his mind as a beholder. Beside the great world-spectacle perpetually in his eye and thought, the small old-world pomps and feudalisms of his own existence had a way of looking ridiculous to him. He constantly felt himself absurd. It was ludicrously clear to him, for instance, that in this kingdom he had inherited it would be thought a huge condescension on his part if he were to ask the secretary of a trades union to dine with him at the Court. Whereas, in his own honest opinion, the secretary had a far more important and interesting post in the universe than he.

So that, in spite of a strong love of family, rigidly kept to himself, he had very few of the illusions which make rank and wealth delightful. On the other hand, he had a tyrannous sense of obligation, which kept him tied to his place and his work — to such work as he had been spending the morning on. This sense of obligation had for the present withdrawn him from any very active share in politics. He had come to the conclusion early in the year, just about the time when, owing to some rearrangements in the *personnel* of the Government, the Premier had made him some extremely flattering overtures, that he must for the present devote himself to the Court. There were extensive changes and reforms going on in different parts of the estate: some of the schools which he owned and mainly supported were being rebuilt and enlarged; and he had a somewhat original scheme for the extension of adult education throughout the property very much on his mind — a scheme which must be organised and carried through by himself apparently, if it was to thrive at all.

Much of this business was very dreary to him, some of it altogether distasteful. Since the day of his parting with Marcella Boyce his only real *pleasures* had lain in politics or books. Politics, just as they were growing absorbing to him, must, for a while at any rate, be put aside; and even books had not fared as well as they might have been expected to do in the country quiet. Day after day he walked or rode about the muddy lanes of the estate, doing the work that seemed to him to be his, as best he could, yet never very certain of its value; rather, spending his thoughts

more and more, with regard to his own place and function in the world, on a sort of mental apologetic which was far from stimulating; sorely conscious the while of the unmatched charm and effectiveness with which his grandfather had gone about the same business; and as lonely at heart as a man can well be — the wound of love unhealed, the wound of friendship still deep and unconsoled. To bring social peace and progress, as he understood them, to this bit of Midland England a man of first-rate capacities was perhaps sacrificing what ambition would have called his opportunities. Yet neither was he a hero to himself nor to the Buckinghamshire farmers and yokels who depended on him. They had liked the grandfather better, and had become stolidly accustomed to the grandson's virtues.

The only gleam in the grey of his life since he had determined about Christmas-time to settle down at the Court had come from Mr. French's letter. That letter, together with Mr. Boyce's posthumous note, which contained nothing, indeed, but a skilful appeal to neighbourliness and old family friendship, written in the best style of the ex-Balkan Commissioner, had naturally astonished him greatly. He saw at once what *she* would perceive in it, and turned impatiently from speculation as to what Mr. Boyce might actually have meant, to the infinitely more important matter, how she would take her father's act. Never had he written anything with greater anxiety than he devoted to his letter to Mrs. Boyce. There was in him now a craving he could not stay, to be brought near to her again, to know how her life was going. It had first

raised its head in him since he knew that her existence and Wharton's were finally parted, and had but gathered strength from the self-critical loneliness and tedium of these later months.

Mrs. Boyce's reply couched in terms at once stately and grateful, which accepted his offer of service on her own and her daughter's behalf, had given him extraordinary pleasure. He turned it over again and again, wondering what part or lot Marcella might have had in it, attributing to her this cordiality or that reticence; picturing the two women together in their black dresses — the hotel, the *pergola*, the cliff — all of which he himself knew well. Finally, he went up to town, saw Mr. French, and acquainted himself with the position and prospects of the Mellor estate, feeling himself a sort of intruder, yet curiously happy in the business. It was wonderful what that poor sickly fellow had been able to do in the last two years; yet his thoughts fell rather into amused surmise as to what *she* would find it in her restless mind to do in the *next* two years.

Nevertheless, all the time, the resolution of which he had spoken to Hallin seemed to himself unshaken. He recognised and adored the womanly growth and deepening which had taken place in her; he saw that she wished to show him kindness. But he thought he could trust himself now and henceforward not to force upon her a renewed suit for which there was in his eyes no real or abiding promise of happiness.

Marcella and her mother had now been at home some three or four days, and he was just about to walk over to Mellor for his first interview with them.

A great deal of the merely formal business consequent on Mr. Boyce's death had been already arranged by himself and Mr. French. Yet he had to consult Marcella as to certain investments, and in a pleasant though quite formal little note he had that morning received from her she had spoken of asking his advice as to some new plans for the estate. It was the first letter she herself had as yet written to him; hitherto all his correspondence had been carried on with Mrs. Boyce. It had struck him, by the way, as remarkable that there was no mention of the wife in the will. He could only suppose that she was otherwise provided for. But there had been some curious expressions in her letters.

Where was Frank? Aldous looked impatiently at the clock, as Roberts did not reappear. He had invited Leven to walk with him to Mellor, and the tiresome boy was apparently not to be found. Aldous vowed he would not wait a minute, and going into the hall, put on coat and hat with most business-like rapidity.

He was just equipped when Roberts, somewhat breathless with long searching, arrived in time to say that Sir Frank was on the front terrace.

And there Aldous caught sight of the straight though somewhat heavily built figure, in its grey suit with the broad band of black across the arm.

"Hullo, Frank! I thought you were to look me up in the library. Roberts has been searching the house for you."

"You said nothing about the library," said the boy, rather sulkily, "and Roberts hadn't far to search. I have been in the smoking-room till this minute."

Aldous did not argue the point, and they set out. It was presently clear to the elder man that his companion was not in the best of tempers. The widowed Lady Leven had sent her firstborn over to the Court for a few days that Aldous might have some discussion as to his immediate future with the young man. She was a silly, frivolous woman; but it was clear, even to her, that Frank was not doing very well for himself in the world; and advice she would not have taken from her son's Oxford tutor seemed cogent to her when it came from a Raeburn. "Do at least, for goodness' sake, get him to give up his absurd plan of going to America!" she wrote to Aldous; "if he can't take his degree at Oxford, I suppose he must get on without it, and certainly his dons seem very unpleasant. But at least he might stay at home and do his duty to me and his sisters till he marries, instead of going off to the 'Rockies' or some other ridiculous place. He really never seems to think of Fanny and Rachel, or what he might do to help me to get them settled now that his poor father is gone."

No; certainly the young man was not much occupied with "Fanny and Rachel!" He spoke with ill-concealed impatience, indeed, of both his sisters and his mother. If his people would get in the way of everything he wanted to do, they needn't wonder if he cut up rough at home. For the present it was settled that he should at any rate go back to Oxford till the end of the summer term — Aldous heartily pitying the unfortunate dons who might have to do with him — but after that he entirely declined to be bound. He swore he would not be tied at home like

a girl; he must and would see the world. This in itself, from a lad who had been accustomed to regard his home as the centre of all delights, and had on two occasions stoutly refused to go with his family to Rome, lest he should miss the best month for his father's trout-stream, was sufficiently surprising.

However, of late some tardy light had been dawning upon Aldous! The night after Frank's arrival at the Court Betty Macdonald came down to spend a few weeks with Miss Raeburn, being for the moment that lady's particular pet and *protégée*. Frank, whose sulkiness during the twenty-four hours before she appeared had been the despair of both his host and hostess, brightened up spasmodically when he heard she was expected, and went fishing with one of the keepers, on the morning before her arrival, with a fair imitation of his usual spirits. But somehow, since that first evening, though Betty had chattered, and danced, and frolicked her best, though her little figure running up and down the big house gave a new zest to life in it, Frank's manners had gone from bad to worse. And at last Aldous, who had not as yet seen the two much together, and was never an observant man in such matters, had begun to have an inkling. Was it *possible* that the boy was in love, and with Betty? He sounded Miss Raeburn; found that she did not rise to his suggestion at all — was, in fact, annoyed by it — and with the usual stupidity of the clever man failed to draw any reasonable inference from the queerness of his aunt's looks and sighs.

As to the little minx herself, she was inscrutable. She teased them all in turns, Frank, perhaps, less than

the others. Aldous, as usual, found her a delightful companion. She would walk all over the estate with him in the most mannish garments and boots conceivable, which only made her childish grace more feminine and more provocative than ever. She took an interest in all his tenants; she dived into all his affairs; she insisted on copying his letters. And meanwhile, on either side were Miss Raeburn, visibly recovering day by day her old cheeriness and bustle, and Frank — Frank, who ate nothing, or nothing commensurate to his bulk, and, if possible, said less.

Aldous had begun to feel that the situation must be probed somehow, and had devised this walk, indeed, with some vague intention of plying remonstrances and enquiries. He had an old affection for the boy, which Lady Leven had reckoned upon.

The first difficulty, of course, was to make him talk at all. Aldous tried various sporting "gambits" with very small success. At last, by good-luck, the boy rose to something like animation in describing an encounter he had had the week before with a piebald weasel in the course of a morning's ferreting.

"All at once we saw the creature's head poke out of the hole — *pure white*, with a brown patch on it. When it saw us, back it scooted! — and we sent in another ferret after the one that was there already. My goodness! there *was* a shindy down in the earth — you could hear them rolling and kicking like anything. We had our guns ready, — but all of a sudden everything stopped — not a sound or a sign of anything! We threw down our guns and dug away like blazes. Presently we came on the two ferrets gorging away at a

dead rabbit, — nasty little beasts! — that accounted for *them;* but where on earth was the weasel? I really began to think we had imagined the creature, when, whish! came a flash of white lightning, and out the thing bolted — pure white with a splash of brown — its winter coat, of course. I shot at it, but it was no go. If I'd only put a bag over the hole, and not been an idiot, I should have caught it."

The boy swung along, busily ruminating for a minute or two, and forgetting his trouble.

"I've seen one something like it before," he went on — "ages ago, when I was a little chap, and Harry Wharton and I were out rabbiting. By the way — " he stopped short — "do you see that that fellow's come back?"

"I saw the paragraph in the *Times* this morning," said Aldous, drily.

"And I've got a letter from Fanny this morning, to say that he and Lady Selina are to be married in July, and that she's going about making a martyr and a saint of him, talking of the 'persecution' he's had to put up with, and the vulgar fellows who couldn't appreciate him, and generally making an ass of herself. Oh! he won't ask any of us to his wedding — trust him. It *is* a rum business. You know Willie Ffolliot — that queer dark fellow — that used to be in the 10th Hussars — did all those wild things in the Soudan?"

"Yes — slightly."

"I heard all about it from him. He was one of that gambling set at Harry's club there's been all that talk about you know, since Harry came to grief. Well! —

he was going along Piccadilly one night last summer, quite late, between eleven and twelve, when Harry caught hold of him from behind. Willie thought he was out of his mind, or drunk. He told me he never saw anybody in such a queer state in his life. 'You come along with me,' said Harry, 'come and talk to me, or I shall shoot myself!' So Willie asked him what was up. 'I'm engaged to be married,' said Harry. Whereupon Willie remarked that, considering his manner and his appearance, he was sorry for the young lady. '*Young!*' said Harry as though he would have knocked him down. And then it came out that he had just — that moment! — engaged himself to Lady Selina. And it was the very same day that he got into that precious mess in the House — the *very same night!* I suppose he went to her to be comforted, and thought he'd pull something off, anyway! Why she took him! But of course she's no chicken, and old Alresford may die any day. And about the bribery business — I suppose he made her think him an injured innocent. Anyway, he talked to Willie, when they got to his rooms, like a raving lunatic, and you know he was always such a cool hand. 'Ffolliot,' he said, 'can you come with me to Siam next week?' 'How much?' said Will. 'I thought you were engaged to Lady Selina.' Then he swore little oaths, and vowed he had told her he must have a year. 'We'll go and explore those temples in Siam,' he said, and then he muttered something about 'Why should I ever come back?' Presently he began to talk of the strike — and the paper — and the bribe, and all the rest of it, making out a long rigmarole story. Oh! of course

he'd done everything for the best — *trust* him! — and everybody else was a cur and a slanderer. And Ffolliot declared he felt quite pulpy — the man was such a wreck; and he said he'd go with him to Siam, or anywhere else, if he'd only cheer up. And they got out the maps, and Harry began to quiet down, and at last Will got him to bed. Fanny says Ffolliot reports he had great difficulty in dragging him home. However, Lady Selina has no luck! — there he is."

"Oh! he will be one of the shining lights of our side before long," said Aldous, with resignation. "Since he gave up his seat here, there has been some talk of finding him one in the Alresfords' neighbourhood, I believe. But I don't suppose anybody's very anxious for him. He is to address a meeting, I see, on the Tory Labour Programme next week. The *Clarion*, I suppose, will go round with him."

"Beastly rag!" said Frank, fervently. "It's rather a queer thing, isn't it, that such a clever chap as that should have made such a mess of his chances. It almost makes one not mind being a fool."

He laughed, but bitterly, and at the same moment the cloud that for some twenty minutes or so seemed to have completely rolled away descended again on eye and expression.

"Well, there are worse things than being a fool," said Aldous, with insidious emphasis — "sulking, and shutting up with your best friends, for instance."

Frank flushed deeply, and turned upon him with a sort of uncertain fury.

"I don't know what you mean."

Whereupon Aldous slipped his arm inside the boy's,

and prepared himself with resignation for the scene that had to be got through somehow, when Frank suddenly exclaimed:

"I say, there's Miss Boyce!"

Never was a man more quickly and completely recalled from altruism to his own affairs. Aldous dropped his companion's arm, straightened himself with a thrill of the whole being, and saw Marcella some distance ahead of them in the Mellor drive, which they had just entered. She was stooping over something on the ground, and was not apparently aware of their approach. A ray of cold sun came out at the moment, touched the bending figure and the grass at her feet — grass starred with primroses, which she was gathering.

"I didn't know you were going to call," said Frank, bewildered. "Isn't it too soon?"

And he looked at his companion in astonishment.

"I came to speak to Miss Boyce and her mother on business," said Aldous, with all his habitual reserve. "I thought you wouldn't mind the walk back by yourself."

"Business?" the boy echoed involuntarily.

Aldous hesitated, then said quietly:

"Mr. Boyce appointed me executor under his will."

Frank lifted his eyebrows, and allowed himself at least an inward "By Jove!"

By this time Marcella had caught sight of them, and was advancing. She was in deep mourning, but her hands were full of primroses, which shone against the black; and the sun, penetrating the thin green of some larches to her left, danced in her eyes and on a face full of sensitive and beautiful expression.

They had not met since they stood together beside Hallin's grave. This fact was in both their minds. Aldous felt it, as it were, in the touch of her hand. What he could not know was, that she was thinking quite as much of his letter to her mother and its phrases.

They stood talking a little in the sunshine. Then, as Frank was taking his leave, Marcella said:

"Won't you wait for — for Lord Maxwell, in the old library? We can get at it from the garden, and I have made it quite habitable. My mother, of course, does not wish to see anybody."

Frank hesitated, then, pushed by a certain boyish curiosity, and by the angry belief that Betty had been carried off by Miss Raeburn, and was out of his reach till luncheon-time, said he would wait. Marcella led the way, opened the garden-door of the lower corridor, close to the spot where she had seen Wharton standing in the moonlight on a never-to-be-forgotten night, and then ushered them into the library. The beautiful old place had been decently repaired, though in no sense modernised. The roof had no holes, and its delicate stucco-work, formerly stained and defaced by damp, had been whitened, so that the brown and golden tones of the books in the latticed cases told against it with delightful effect. The floor was covered with a cheap matting, and there were a few simple chairs and tables. A wood fire burnt on the old hearth. Marcella's books and work lay about, and some shallow earthenware pans filled with home-grown hyacinths scented the air. What with the lovely architecture of the room itself, its size, its

books and old portraits, and the signs it bore of simple yet refined use, it would have been difficult to find a gentler, mellower place. Aldous looked round him with delight.

"I hope to make a village drawing-room of it in time," she said casually to Frank as she stooped to put a log on the fire. "I think we shall get them to come, as it has a separate door, and scraper, and mat all to itself."

"Goodness!" said Frank, "they won't come. It's too far from the village."

"Don't you be so sure," said Marcella, laughing. "Mr. Craven has all sorts of ideas."

"Who's Mr. Craven?"

"Didn't you meet him at my rooms?"

"Oh! I remember," ejaculated the boy — "a frightful Socialist!"

"And his wife's worse," said Marcella, merrily. "They've come down to settle here. They're going to help me."

"Then for mercy's sake keep them to yourself," cried Frank, "and don't let them go loose over the county. We don't want them at our place."

"Oh! your turn will come. Lord Maxwell" — her tone changed — became shy and a little grave. "Shall we go into the Stone Parlour? My mother will come down if you wish to see her, but she thought that — that — perhaps we could settle things."

Aldous had been standing by, hat in hand, watching her as she chattered to Frank. As she addressed him he gave a little start.

"Oh! I think we can settle everything," he said.

"Well, this is rum!" said Frank to himself, as the door closed behind them, and instead of betaking himself to the chair and the newspaper with which Marcella had provided him, he began to walk excitedly up and down. "Her father makes him executor — he manages her property for her — and they behave nicely to each other, as though nothing had ever happened at all. What the deuce does it mean? And all the time Betty — why, Betty's devoted to him! — and it's as plain as a pikestaff what that old cat, Miss Raeburn, is thinking of from morning till night! Well, I'm beat!"

And throwing himself down on a stool by the fire, his chin between his hands, he stared dejectedly at the burning logs.

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE Marcella and her companion were sitting in the Stone Parlour side by side, save for a small table between them, which held the various papers Aldous had brought with him. At first, there had been on her side — as soon as they were alone — a feeling of stifling embarrassment. All the painful, proud sensations with which she had received the news of her father's action returned upon her; she would have liked to escape; she shrank from what once more seemed an encroachment, a situation as strange as it was embarrassing.

But his manner very soon made it impossible, indeed ridiculous, to maintain such an attitude of mind. He ran through his business with his usual clearness and rapidity. It was not complicated; her views proved to be the same as his; and she was empowered to decide for her mother. Aldous took notes of one or two of her wishes, left some papers with her for her mother's signature, and then his work was practically done. Nothing, throughout, could have been more reassuring or more everyday than his demeanour.

Then, indeed, when the end of their business interview approached, and with it the opportunity for conversation of a different kind, both were conscious of a certain tremor. To him this old parlour was torturingly full of memories. In this very place where

they sat he had given her his mother's pearls, and taken a kiss in return from the cheek that was once more so near to him. With what free and exquisite curves the hair set about the white brow! How beautiful was the neck — the hand! What ripened, softened charm in every movement! The touching and rebuking thought rose in his mind that from her nursing experience, and its frank contact with the ugliest realities of the physical life — a contact he had often shrunk from realising — there had come to her, not so much added strength, as a new subtlety and sweetness, some delicate, vibrating quality, that had been entirely lacking to her first splendid youth.

Suddenly she said to him, with a certain hesitation:

"There was one more point I wanted to speak to you about. Can you advise me about selling some of those railway shares?"

She pointed to an item in a short list of investments that lay beside them.

"But why?" said Aldous, surprised. "They are excellent property already, and are going up in value."

"Yes, I know. But I want some ready money immediately — more than we have — to spend on cottage-building in the village. I saw a builder yesterday and came to a first understanding with him. We are altering the water-supply too. They have begun upon it already, and it will cost a good deal."

Aldous was still puzzled.

"I see," he said. "But — don't you suppose that the income of the estate, now that your father has done so much to free it, will be enough to meet expenses of that kind, without trenching on investments?

A certain amount, of course, should be systematically laid aside every year for rebuilding, and estate improvements generally."

"Yes; but you see I only regard half of the income as mine."

She looked up with a little smile.

He was now standing in front of her, against the fire, his grey eyes, which could be, as she well knew, so cold and inexpressive, bent upon her with eager interest.

"Only half the income?" he repeated. "Ah!" — he smiled kindly — "is that an arrangement between you and your mother?"

Marcella let her hand fall with a little despairing gesture.

"Oh no!" she said — "oh no! Mamma — mamma will take nothing from me or from the estate. She has her own money, and she will live with me part of the year."

The intonation in the words touched Aldous profoundly.

"Part of the year?" he said, astonished, yet not knowing how to question her. "Mrs. Boyce will not make Mellor her home?"

"She would be thankful if she had never seen it," said Marcella, quickly — "and she would never see it again if it weren't for me. It's dreadful what she went through last year, when — when I was in London."

Her voice fell. Glancing up at him involuntarily, her eye looked with dread for some chill, some stiffening in him. Probably he condemned her, had always condemned her for deserting her home and her parents. But instead she saw nothing but sympathy.

"Mrs. Boyce has had a hard life," he said, with grave feeling.

Marcella felt a tear leap, and furtively raised her handkerchief to brush it away. Then, with a natural selfishness, her quick thought took another turn. A wild yearning rose in her mind to tell him much more than she had ever done in old days of the miserable home-circumstances of her early youth; to lay stress on the mean unhappiness which had depressed her own child-nature whenever she was with her parents, and had withered her mother's character. Secretly, passionately, she often made the past an excuse. Excuse for what? For the lack of delicacy and loyalty, of the best sort of breeding, which had marked the days of her engagement?

Never — *never* to speak of it with him! — to pour out everything — to ask him to judge, to understand, to forgive! — .

She pulled herself together by a strong effort, reminding herself in a flash of all that divided them: — of womanly pride — of Betty Macdonald's presence at the Court — of that vain confidence to Hallin, of which her inmost being must have been ashamed, but that something calming and sacred stole upon her whenever she thought of Hallin, lifting everything concerned with him into a category of its own.

No; let her selfish weakness make no fettering claim upon the man before her. Let her be content with the friendship she had, after all, achieved, that was now doing its kindly best for her.

All these images, like a tumultuous procession, ran through the mind in a moment. He thought, as she

sat there with her bent head, the hands clasped round the knee in the way he knew so well, that she was full of her mother, and found it difficult to put what she felt into words.

"But tell me about your plan," he said gently, "if you will."

"Oh! it is nothing," she said hurriedly. "I am afraid you will think it impracticable — perhaps wrong. It's only this: you see, as there is no one depending on me — as I am practically alone — it seemed to me I might make an experiment. Four thousand a year is a great deal more than I need ever spend — than I *ought*, of course, to spend on myself. I don't think altogether what I used to think. I mean to keep up this house — to make it beautiful, to hand it on, perhaps *more* beautiful than I found it, to those that come after. And I mean to maintain enough service in it both to keep it in order and to make it a social centre for all the people about — for everybody of all classes, so far as I can. I want it to be a place of amusement and delight and talk to us all — especially to the very poor. After all" — her cheek flushed under the quickening of her thought — "*everybody* on the estate, in their different degree, has contributed to this house, in some sense, for generations. I want it to come into their lives — to make it *their* possession, *their* pride, — as well as mine. But then that isn't all. The people here can enjoy nothing, use nothing, till they have a worthier life of their own. Wages here, you know, are terribly low, much lower" — she added timidly — "than with you. They are, as a rule, eleven or twelve shillings a week. Now there

seem to be about one hundred and sixty labourers on the estate altogether, in the farmers' employment and in our own. Some, of course, are boys, and some old men earning a half-wage. Mr. Craven and I have worked it out, and we find that an average weekly increase of five shillings per head — which would give the men of full age and in full work about a pound a week — would work out at about two thousand a year."

She paused a moment, trying to put her further statement into its best order.

"Your farmers, you know," he said, smiling, after a pause, "will be your chief difficulty."

"Of course! But I thought of calling a meeting of them. I have discussed it with Mr. French — of course he thinks me mad! — but he gave me some advice. I should propose to them all fresh leases, with certain small advantages that Louis Craven thinks would tempt them, at a reduced rental exactly answering to the rise in wages. Then, in return they must accept a sort of fair-wage clause, binding them to pay henceforward the standard wage of the estate."

She looked up, her face expressing urgent though silent interrogation.

"You must remember," he said quickly, "that though the estate is recovering, and rents have been fairly paid about here during the last eighteen months, you may be called upon at any moment to make the reductions which hampered your uncle. These reductions will, of course, fall upon you as before, seeing that the farmers, in a different way, will be paying as much as before. Have you left margin enough?"

"I think so," she said eagerly. "I shall live here very simply, and accumulate all the reserve fund I can. I have set all my heart upon it. I know there are not many people *could* do such a thing — other obligations would, must, come first. And it may turn out a mistake. But — whatever happens — whatever any of us, Socialists or not, may hope for in the future — here one *is* with one's conscience, and one's money, and these people, who like oneself have but the one life? In all labour, it is the modern question, isn't it? — *how much* of the product of labour the workman can extract from the employer? About here there is no union to act for the labourers — they have practically no power. But *in the future*, we must surely *hope* they will combine, that they will be stronger — strong enough to *force* a decent wage. What ought to prevent my free will anticipating a moment — since I *can* do it — that we all want to see?"

She spoke with a strong feeling; but his ear detected a new note — something deeper and wistfuller than of old.

"Well — as you say, you are for experiments!" he replied, not finding it easy to produce his own judgment quickly. Then, in another tone — "it was always Hallin's cry."

She glanced up at him, her lips trembling.

"I know. Do you remember how he used to say — 'the big changes may come — the big Collectivist changes. But neither you nor I will see them. I pray *not* to see them. Meanwhile — all still hangs upon, comes back to, the individual. Here are you

with your money and power; there are those men and women whom you can share with — in new and honourable ways — *to-day.*'"

Then she checked herself suddenly.

"But now I want you to tell me — will you tell me? — all the objections you see. You must often have thought such things over."

She was looking nervously straight before her. She did not see the flash of half-bitter, half-tender irony that crossed his face. Her tone of humility, of appeal, was so strange to him, remembering the past.

"Yes, very often," he answered. "Well, I think these are the kind of arguments you will have to meet."

He went through the objections that any economist would be sure to weigh against a proposal of the kind, as clearly as he could, and at some length — but without zest. What affected Marcella all through was not so much the matter of what he said, as the manner of it. It was so characteristic of the two voices in him — the voice of the idealist checked and mocked always by the voice of the observer and the student. A year before, the little harangue would have set her aflame with impatience and wrath. Now, beneath the speaker, she felt and yearned towards the man.

Yet, as to the scheme, when all demurs were made, she was "of the same opinion still"! His arguments were not new to her; the inward eagerness over-rode them.

"In my own case" — he said at last, the tone passing instantly into reserve and shyness, as always happened when he spoke of himself — "my own wages are two or three shillings higher than those paid generally by

the farmers on the estate; and we have a pension fund. But so far, I have felt the risks of any wholesale disturbance of labour on the estate, depending, as it must entirely in my case, on the individual life and will, to be too great to let me go further. I sometimes believe that it is the farmers who would really benefit most by experiments of the kind!"

She protested vehemently, being at the moment, of course, not at all in love with mankind in general, but only with those members of mankind who came within the eye of imagination. He was enchanted to see the old self come out again — positive, obstinate, generous; to see the old confident pose of the head, the dramatic ease of gesture.

Meanwhile something that had to be said, that must, indeed, be said, if he were to give her serious and official advice, pressed uncomfortably on his tongue.

"You know," he said, not looking at her, when at last she had for the moment exhausted argument and prophecy, "you have to think of those who will succeed you here; still more you have to think — of marriage — before you pledge yourself to the halving of your income."

Now he must needs look at her intently, out of sheer nervousness. The difficulty he had had in compelling himself to make the speech at all had given a certain hardness and stiffness to his voice. She felt a sudden shock and chill — resented what he had dismally felt to be an imperative duty.

"I do not think I have any need to think of it — in this connection," she said proudly. And getting up, she began to gather her papers together.

The spell was broken, the charm gone. He felt that he was dismissed.

With a new formality and silence, she led the way into the hall, he following. As they neared the library there was a sound of voices.

Marcella opened the door in surprise, and there, on either side of the fire, sat Betty Macdonald and Frank Leven.

"*That's* a mercy!" cried Betty, running forward to Marcella and kissing her. "I really don't know what would have happened if Mr. Leven and I had been left alone any longer. As for the Kilkenny cats, my dear, don't mention them!"

The child was flushed and agitated, and there was an angry light in her blue eyes. Frank looked simply lumpish and miserable.

"Yes, here I am," said Betty, holding Marcella, and chattering as fast as possible. "I made Miss Raeburn bring me over, that I might *just* catch a sight of you. She would walk home, and leave the carriage for me. Isn't it like all the topsy-turvy things nowadays? When *I'm* her age I suppose I shall have gone back to dolls. Please to look at those ponies! — they're pawing your gravel to bits. And as for my watch, just inspect it!" — She thrust it reproachfully under Marcella's eyes. "You've been such a time in there talking, that Sir Frank and I have had time to quarrel for life, and there isn't a minute left for anything rational. Oh! good-bye, my dear, good-bye. I never kept Miss Raeburn waiting for lunch yet, did I, Mr. Aldous? and I mustn't begin now. Come along, Mr. Aldous! You'll have to come home with me.

I'm frightened to death of those ponies. You shan't drive, but if they bolt, I'll give them to you to pull in. Dear, *dear* Marcella, let me come again — soon — directly!"

A few more sallies and kisses, a few more angry looks at Frank and appeals to Aldous, who was much less responsive than usual, and the child was seated, very erect and rosy, on the driving seat of the little pony-carriage, with Aldous beside her.

"Are you coming, Frank?" said Aldous; "there's plenty of room."

His strong brow had a pucker of annoyance. As he spoke he looked, not at Frank, but at Marcella. She was standing a trifle back, among the shadows of the doorway, and her attitude conveyed to him an impression of proud aloofness. A sigh that was half pain, half resignation, passed his lips unconsciously.

"Thank you, I'll walk," said Frank, fiercely.

"Now, will you please explain to me why you look like that, and talk like that?" said Marcella, with cutting composure, when she was once more in the library, and Frank, crimson to the roots of his hair, and saying incoherent things, had followed her there.

"I should think you might guess," said Frank, in reproachful misery, as he hung over the fire.

"Not at all!" said Marcella; "you are rude to Betty, and disagreeable to me, by which I suppose that you are unhappy. But why should *you* be allowed to show your feelings, when other people don't?"

Frank fairly groaned.

"Well," he said, making efforts at a tragic calm, and looking for his hat, "you will, none of you, be troubled with me long. I shall go home to-morrow, and take my ticket for California the day after."

"*You*," said Marcella, "go to California! What right have you to go to California?"

"What right?" Frank stared, then he went on impetuously. "If a girl torments a man, as Betty has been tormenting me, there is nothing for it, I should think, but to clear out of the way. I am going to clear out of the way, whatever anybody says."

"And shoot big game, I suppose — amuse yourself somehow?"

Frank hesitated.

"Well, a fellow can't do nothing," he said helplessly. "I suppose I shall shoot."

"And what right have you to do it? Have you any more right than a public official would have to spend public money in neglecting his duties?"

Frank stared at her.

"Well, I don't know what you mean," he said at last, angrily; "give it up."

"It's quite simple what I mean. You have inherited your father's property. Your tenants pay you rent, that comes from their labour. Are you going to make no return for your income, and your house, and your leisure?"

"Ah! that's your Socialism!" cried the young fellow, roused by her tone. "No return? Why, they have the land."

"If I were a thorough-going Socialist," said Marcella.

steadily, "I should say to you, Go! The sooner you throw off all ties to your property, the sooner you prove to the world that you and your class are mere useless parasites, the sooner we shall be rid of you. But unfortunately *I* am not such a good Socialist as that. I waver — I am not sure of what I wish. But one thing I *am* sure of, that unless people like you are going to treat their lives as a profession, to take their calling seriously, there are no more superfluous drones, no more idle plunderers than you, in all civilised society!"

Was she pelting him in this way that she might so get rid of some of her own inner smart and restlessness? If so, the unlucky Frank could not guess it. He could only feel himself intolerably ill-used. He had meant to pour himself out to her on the subject of Betty and his woes, and here she was rating him as to his *duties*, of which he had hardly as yet troubled himself to think, being entirely taken up either with his grievances or his enjoyments.

"I'm sure you know you're talking nonsense," he said sulkily, though he shrank from meeting her fiery look. "And if I *am* idle, there are plenty of people idler than me — people who live on their money, with no land to bother about, and nothing to do for it at all."

"On the contrary, it is they who have an excuse. They have no natural opening, perhaps — no plain call. You have both, and, as I said before, you have no *right* to take holidays before you have earned them. You have got to learn your business first, and then do it. Give your eight hours' day like other people! Who are you that you should have all the cake of the world, and other people the crusts?"

Frank walked to the window, and stood staring out, with his back turned to her. Her words stung and tingled; and he was too miserable to fight.

"I shouldn't care whether it were cake or crusts," he said at last, in a low voice, turning round to her, "if only Betty would have me."

"Do you think she is any the more likely to have you," said Marcella, unrelenting, "if you behave as a loafer and a runaway? Don't you suppose that Betty has good reasons for hesitating when she sees the difference between you — and — and other people?"

Frank looked at her sombrely — a queer mixture of expressions on the face, in which the maturer man was already to be discerned at war with the powerful young animal.

"I suppose you mean Lord Maxwell?"

There was a pause.

"You may take what I said," she said at last, looking into the fire, "as meaning anybody who pays honestly with work and brains for what society has given him — as far as he can pay, at any rate."

"Now look here," said Frank, coming dolefully to sit down beside her; "don't slate me any more. I'm a bad lot, I know — well, an idle lot — I don't think I am a *bad* lot — But it's no good your preaching to me while Betty 's sticking pins into me like this. Now just let me tell you how she's been behaving."

Marcella succumbed, and heard him. He glanced at her surreptitiously from time to time, but he could make nothing of her. She sat very quiet while he described the constant companionship between Aldous and Betty, and the evident designs of Miss Raeburn.

Just as when he made his first confidences to her in London, he was vaguely conscious that he was doing a not very gentlemanly thing. But again, he was too unhappy to restrain himself, and he longed somehow to make an ally of her.

"Well, I have only one thing to say," she said at last, with an odd nervous impatience — "go and ask her, and have done with it! She might have some respect for you then. No, I won't help you; but if you don't succeed, I'll pity you — I promise you that. And now you must go away."

He went, feeling himself hardly treated, yet conscious nevertheless of a certain stirring of the moral waters which had both stimulus and balm in it.

She, left behind, sat quiet in the old library for a few lonely minutes. The boy's plight made her alternately scornful and repentant of her sharpness to him. As to his report, one moment it plunged her in an anguish she dared not fathom; the next she was incredulous — could not simply make herself take the thing as real.

But one thing had been real — that word from Aldous to her of "*marriage*"! The nostril dilated, the breast heaved, as she lost all thought of Frank in a resentful passion that could neither justify nor calm itself. It seemed still as though he had struck her. Yet she knew well that she had nothing to forgive.

Next morning she went down to the village meaning to satisfy herself on two or three points connected with the new cottages. On the way she knocked at the Rectory garden-door, in the hope of finding Mary Harden and persuading her to come with her.

She had not seen much of Mary since their return. Still, she had had time to be painfully struck once or twice with the white and bloodless look of the Rector's sister, and with a certain patient silence about her which seemed to Marcella new. Was it the monotony of the life? or had both of them been overworking and underfeeding as usual? The Rector had received Marcella with his old gentle but rather distant kindness. Two years before he had felt strongly about many of her proceedings, and had expressed himself frankly enough, at least to Mary. Now he had put his former disapprovals out of his mind, and was only anxious to work smoothly with the owner of Mellor. He had a great respect for "dignities," and she, as far as the village was concerned, was to be his "dignity" henceforward. Moreover, he humbly and truly hoped that she might be able to enlighten him as to a good many modern conceptions and ideas about the poor, for which, absorbed as he was, either in almsgiving of the traditional type, or spiritual ministration, or sacramental theory, he had little time, and, if the truth were known, little affinity.

In answer to her knock Marcella heard a faint "Come in" from the interior of the house. She walked into the dining-room, and found Mary sitting by the little table in tears. There were some letters before her, which she pushed away as Marcella entered, but she did not attempt to disguise her agitation.

"What is it, dear? Tell me," said Marcella, sitting down beside her, and kissing one of the hands she held.

And Mary told her. It was the story of her life — a simple tale of ordinary things, such as wring the quiet hearts and train the unnoticed saints of this world. In her first youth, when Charles Harden was for a time doing some divinity lecturing in his Oxford college, Mary had gone up to spend a year with him in lodgings. Their Sunday teas and other small festivities were frequented by her brother's friends, men of like type with himself, and most of them either clergymen or about to be ordained. Between one of them, a young fellow looking out for his first curacy, and Mary an attachment had sprung up, which Mary could not even now speak of. She hurried over it, with a trembling voice, to the tragedy beyond. Mr. Shelton got his curacy, went off to a parish in the Lincolnshire Fens, and there was talk of their being married in a year or so. But the exposure of a bitter winter's night, risked in the struggle across one of the bleakest flats of the district to carry the Sacrament to a dying parishioner, had brought on a peculiar and agonising form of neuralgia. And from this pain, so nobly earned, had sprung — oh! mystery of human fate! — a morphia-habit, with all that such a habit means for mind and body. It was discovered by the poor fellow's brother, who brought him up to London and tried to cure him. Meanwhile he himself had written to Mary to give her up. "I have no will left, and am no longer a man," he wrote to her. "It would be an outrage on my part, and a sin on yours, if we did not cancel our promise." Charles, who took a hard, ascetic view, held much the same language, and Mary submitted, heart-broken.

Then came a gleam of hope. The brother's care and affection prevailed; there were rumours of great improvement, of a resumption of work. "Just two years ago, when you first came here, I was beginning to believe" — she turned away her head to hide the rise of tears — "that it might still come right." But after some six or eight months of clerical work in London fresh trouble developed, lung mischief showed itself, and the system, undermined by long and deep depression, seemed to capitulate at once.

"He died last December, at Madeira," said Mary, quietly. "I saw him before he left England. We wrote to each other almost to the end. He was quite at peace. This letter here was from the chaplain at Madeira, who was kind to him, to tell me about his grave."

That was all. It was the sort of story that somehow might have been expected to belong to Mary Harden — to her round, plaintive face, to her narrow, refined experience; and she told it in a way eminently characteristic of her modes of thinking, religious or social, with old-fashioned or conventional phrases which, whatever might be the case with other people, had lost none of their bloom or meaning for her.

Marcella's face showed her sympathy. They talked for half an hour, and at the end of it Mary flung her arms round her companion's neck.

"There!" she said, "now we must not talk any more about it. I am glad I told you. It was a comfort. And somehow — I don't mean to be unkind; but I couldn't have told you in the old days — it's wonderful how much better I like you now than I

used to do, though perhaps we don't agree much better."

Both laughed, though the eyes of both were full of tears.

Presently they were in the village together. As they neared the Hurds' old cottage, which was now empty and to be pulled down, a sudden look of disgust crossed Marcella's face.

"Did I tell you my news of Minta Hurd?" she said.

No; Mary had heard nothing. So Marcella told the grotesque and ugly news, as it seemed to her, which had reached her at Amalfi. Jim Hurd's widow was to be married again, to the queer lanky "professor of elocution," with the Italian name and shifty eye, who lodged on the floor beneath her in Brown's Buildings, and had been wont to come in of an evening and play comic songs to her and the children. Marcella was vehemently sure that he was a charlatan — that he got his living by a number of small dishonesties, that he had scented Minta's pension. But apart from the question whether he would make Minta a decent husband, or live upon her and beat her, was the fact itself of her re-marriage, in itself hideous to the girl.

"*Marry* him!" she said. "Marry any one! Isn't it incredible?"

They were in front of the cottage. Marcella paused a moment and looked at it. She saw again in sharp vision the miserable woman fainting on the settle, the dwarf sitting, handcuffed, under the eye of his cap-

tors; she felt again the rush of that whirlwind of agony through which she had borne the wife's helpless soul in that awful dawn.

And after that—exit!—with her "professor of elocution." It made the girl sick to think of. And Mary, out of a Puseyite dislike of second marriage, felt and expressed much the same repulsion.

Well—Minta Hurd was far away, and if she had been there to defend herself her powers of expression would have been no match for theirs. Nor does youth understand such pleas as she might have urged.

"Will Lord Maxwell continue the pension?" said Mary.

Marcella stopped again, involuntarily.

"So that was his doing?" she said. "I supposed as much."

"You did not know?" cried Mary, in distress. "Oh! I believe I ought not to have said anything about it."

"I always guessed it," said Marcella, shortly, and they walked on in silence.

Presently they found themselves in front of Mrs. Jellison's very trim and pleasant cottage, which lay farther along the common, to the left of the road to the Court. There was an early pear-tree in blossom over the porch, and a swelling greenery of buds in the little garden.

"Will you come in?" said Mary. "I should like to see Isabella Westall."

Marcella started at the name.

"How is she?" she asked.

"Just the same. She has never been in her right mind since. But she is quite harmless and quiet."

They found Mrs. Jellison on one side of the fire, with her daughter on the other, and the little six-year-old Johnnie playing between them. Mrs. Jellison was straw-plaiting, twisting the straws with amazing rapidity, her fingers stained with red from the dye of them. Isabella was, as usual, doing nothing. She stared when Marcella and Mary came in, but she took no other notice of them. Her powerful and tragic face had the look of something originally full of intention, from which spirit and meaning had long departed, leaving a fine but lifeless outline. Marcella had seen it last on the night of the execution, in ghastly apparition at Minta Hurd's window, when it might have been caught by some sculptor in quest of the secrets of violent expression, fixed in clay or marble, and labelled "Revenge," or "Passion."

Its passionless emptiness now filled her with pity and horror. She sat down beside the widow and took her hand. Mrs. Westall allowed it for a moment, then drew her own away suddenly, and Marcella saw a curious and sinister contraction of the eyes.

"Ah! yo never know how much Isabella unnerstan's, an' how much she don't," Mrs. Jellison was saying to Mary. "I can't allus make her out, but she don't give no trouble. An' as for that boy, he's a chirruper, he is. He gives 'em fine times at school, he do. Miss Barton, she ast him in class, Thursday, 'bout Ananias and Sappira. 'Johnnie,' says she, 'whatever made 'em do sich a wicked thing?' 'Well, *I* do'n' know,' says he; 'it was jus' their nassty good-for-nothink,' says he; 'but they was great sillies,' says

he. Oh! he don't mean no harm!—lor' bless yer, the men is all born contrary, and they can't help themselves. Oh! thank yer, miss, my 'ealth is pretty tidy, though I 'ave been plagued this winter with a something they call the 'flenzy. I wor very bad! 'Yo go to bed, Mrs. Jellison,' says Dr. Sharpe, 'or yo'll know of it.' But I worn't goin' to be talked to by 'im. Why, I knowed 'im when he wor no 'igher nor Jôhnnie. An' I kep' puddlin' along, an' one mornin' I wor fairly choked, an' I just crawled into that parlour, an' I took a sup o' brandy out o' the bottle"—she looked complacently at Mary, quite conscious that the Rector's sister must be listening to her with disapproving ears—"an', lor' bless yer, it cut the phlegm, it did, that very moment. My! I did cough. I drawed it up by the yard, I did—and I crep' back along the wall, and yo cud ha' knocked me down wi' one o' my own straws. But I've been better iver since, an' beginnin' to eat my vittles, too, though I'm never no great pecker—I ain't—not at no time."

Mary managed to smother her emotions on the subject of the brandy, and the old woman chattered on, throwing out the news of the village in a series of humorous fragments, tinged in general with the lowest opinion of human nature.

When the girls took leave of her, she said slily to Marcella:

"An' 'ow about your plaitin', miss?—though I dessay I'm a bold 'un for astin'."

Marcella coloured.

"Well, I've got it to think about, Mrs. Jellison. We must have a meeting in the village and talk it over one of these days."

The old woman nodded in a shrewd silence, and watched them depart.

"Wull, I reckon Jimmy Gedge ull lasst my time," she said to herself with a chuckle.

If Mrs. Jellison had this small belief in the powers of the new mistress of Mellor over matters which, according to her, had been settled generations ago by "the Lord and natur'," Marcella certainly was in no mood to contradict her. She walked through the village on her return scanning everything about her — the slatternly girls plaiting on the doorsteps, the children in the lane, the loungers round the various "publics," the labourers, old and young, who touched their caps to her — with a moody and passionate eye.

"Mary!" she broke out as they neared the Rectory, "I shall be twenty-four directly. How much harm do you think I shall have done here by the time I am sixty-four?"

Mary laughed at her, and tried to cheer her. But Marcella was in the depths of self-disgust.

"What is wanted, really wanted," she said with intensity, "is not *my* help, but *their* growth. How can I make them *take for themselves* — take, roughly and selfishly even, if they will only take! As for my giving, what relation has it to anything real or lasting?"

Mary was scandalised.

"I declare you are as bad as Mr. Craven," she said. "He told Charles yesterday that the curtseys of the old women in the village to him and Charles — women old enough to be their grandmothers — sickened him

of the whole place, and that he should regard it as the chief object of his work here to make such things impossible in the future. Or perhaps you're still of Mr. — Mr. Wharton's opinion — you'll be expecting Charles and me to give up charity. But it's no good, my dear. We're not 'advanced,' and we never shall be."

At the mention of Wharton Marcella threw her proud head back; wave after wave of changing expression passed over the face.

"I often remember the things Mr. Wharton said in this village," she said at last. "There was life and salt and power in many of them. It's not what he said, but what he was, that one wants to forget."

They parted presently, and Marcella went heavily home. The rising of the spring, the breath of the April air, had never yet been sad and oppressive to her as they were to-day.

CHAPTER VI.

"Oh! Miss Boyce, may I come in?"

The voice was Frank Leven's. Marcella was sitting in the old library alone late on the following afternoon. Louis Craven, who was now her paid agent and adviser, had been with her, and she had accounts and estimates before her.

"Come in," she said, startled a little by Frank's tone and manner, and looking at him interrogatively.

Frank shut the heavy old door carefully behind him. Then, as he advanced to her she saw that his flushed face wore an expression unlike anything she had yet seen there — of mingled joy and fear.

She drew back involuntarily.

"Is there anything — anything wrong?"

"No," he said impetuously, "no! But I have something to tell you, and I don't know how. I don't know whether I ought. I have run almost all the way from the Court."

And, indeed, he could hardly get his breath. He took a stool she pushed to him, and tried to collect himself. She heard her heart beat as she waited for him to speak.

"It's about Lord Maxwell," he said at last, huskily, turning his head away from her to the fire. "I've just had a long walk with him. Then he left me; he had no idea I came on here. But something drove

me; I felt I must come, I must tell. Will you promise not to be angry with me — to believe that I've thought about it — that I'm doing it for the best?"

He looked at her nervously.

"If you wouldn't keep me waiting so long," she said faintly, while her cheeks and lips grew white.

"Well, — I was mad this morning! Betty hasn't spoken to me since yesterday. She's been always about with him, and Miss Raeburn let me see once or twice last night that she thought I was in the way. I never slept a wink last night, and I kept out of their sight all the morning. Then, after lunch, I went up to him, and I asked him to come for a walk with me. He looked at me rather queerly — I suppose I was pretty savage. Then he said he'd come. And off we went, ever so far across the park. And I let out. I don't know what I said; I suppose I made a beast of myself. But anyway, I asked him to tell me what he meant, and to tell me, if he could, what Betty meant. I said I knew I was a cool hand, and he might turn me out of the house, and refuse to have anything more to do with me if he liked. But I was going to rack and ruin, and should never be any good till I knew where I stood — and Betty would never be serious — and, in short, was he in love with her himself? for any one could see what Miss Raeburn was thinking of."

The boy gulped down something like a sob, and tried to give himself time to be coherent again. Marcella sat like a stone.

"When he heard me say that — 'in love with her yourself,' he stopped dead. I saw that I had made him angry. 'What right have you or any one else,' he

said, very short, 'to ask me such a question?' Then I just lost my head, and said anything that came handy. I told him everybody talked about it — which, of course, was rubbish — and at last I said, 'Ask anybody; ask the Winterbournes, ask Miss Boyce — they all think it as much as I do.' '*Miss Boyce!*' he said — 'Miss Boyce thinks I want to marry Betty Macdonald?' Then I didn't know what to say — for, of course, I knew I'd taken your name in vain; and he sat down on the grass beside a little stream there is in the park, and he didn't speak to me for a long time — I could see him throwing little stones into the water. And at last he called me. 'Frank!' he said; and I went up to him. And then —"

The lad seemed to tremble all over. He bent forward and laid his hand on Marcella's knee, touching her cold ones.

"And then he said, 'I can't understand yet, Frank, how you or anybody else can have mistaken my friendship for Betty Macdonald. At any rate, I know there's been no mistake on her part. And if you take my advice, you'll go and speak to her like a man, with all your heart, and see what she says. You don't deserve her yet, that I can tell you. As for me' — I can't describe the look of his face; I only know I wanted to go away — 'you and I will be friends for many years, I hope, so perhaps you may just understand this, once for all. For me there never has been, and there never will be, but one woman in the world — to love. And you know,' he said after a bit, 'or you ought to know, very well, who that woman is.' And then he got up and walked away. He did not ask me to come,

and I felt I dared not go after him. And then I lay and thought. I remembered being here; I thought of what I had said to you — of what I had fancied now and then about — about you. I felt myself a brute all round; for what right had I to come and tell you what he told me? And yet, there it was — I had to come. And if it was no good my coming, why, we needn't say anything about it ever, need we? But — but — just look here, Miss Boyce; if you — if you could begin over again, and make Aldous happy, then there'd be a good many other people happy too — I can tell you that."

He could hardly speak plainly. Evidently there was on him an overmastering impulse of personal devotion, gratitude, remorse, which for the moment even eclipsed his young passion. It was but vaguely explained by anything he had said; it rested clearly on the whole of his afternoon's experience.

But neither could Marcella speak, and her pallor began to alarm him.

"I say!" he cried; "you're not angry with me?"

She moved away from him, and with her shaking finger began to cut the pages of a book that lay open on the mantelpiece. The little mechanical action seemed gradually to restore her to self-control.

"I don't think I can talk about it," she said at last, with an effort; "not now."

"Oh! I know," said Frank, in penitence, looking at her black dress; "you've been upset, and had such a lot of trouble. But I —"

She laid her hand on his shoulder. He thought he had never seen her so beautiful, pale as she was.

"I'm not the least angry. I'll tell you so — another day. Now, are you going to Betty?"

The young fellow sprang up, all his expression changing, answering to the stimulus of the word.

"They'll be home directly, Miss Raeburn and Betty," he said steadily, buttoning his coat; "they'd gone out calling somewhere. Oh! she'll lead me a wretched life, will Betty, before she's done!"

A charming little ghost of a smile crossed Marcella's white lips.

"Probably Betty knows her business," she said; "if she's quite unmanageable, send her to me."

In his general turmoil of spirits the boy caught her hand and kissed it — would have liked, indeed, to kiss her and all the world. But she laughed, and sent him away, and with a sly, lingering look at her he departed.

She sank into her chair and never moved for long. The April sun was just sinking behind the cedars, and through the open south window of the library came little spring airs and scents of spring flowers. There was an endless twitter of birds, and beside her the soft chatter of the wood fire. An hour before, her mood had been at open war with the spring, and with all those impulses and yearnings in herself which answered to it. Now it seemed to her that a wonderful and buoyant life, akin to all the vast stir, the sweet revivals of Nature, was flooding her whole being.

She gave herself up to it, in a trance interwoven with all the loveliest and deepest things she had ever felt — with her memory of Hallin, with her new grop-

ings after God. Just as the light was going she got up hurriedly and went to her writing-table. She wrote a little note, sat over it a while, with her face hidden in her hands, then sealed, addressed, and stamped it. She went out herself to the hall to put it in the letter-box. For the rest of the evening she went about in a state of dream, overcome sometimes by rushes of joy, which yet had in them exquisite elements of pain; hungering for the passage of the hours, for sleep that might cancel some of them; picturing the road to the Court and Widrington, along which the old postman had by now carried her letter — the bands of moonlight and shade lying across it, the quiet of the budding woods, and the spot on the hillside where he had spoken to her in that glowing October. It must lie all night in a dull office — her letter; she was impatient and sorry for it. And when he got it, it would tell him nothing, though she thought it would rather surprise him. It was the merest formal request that he would, if he could, come and see her again the following morning on business.

During the evening Mrs. Boyce lay on the sofa and read. It always still gave the daughter a certain shock of surprise when she saw the slight form resting in this way. In words Mrs. Boyce would allow nothing, and her calm composure had been unbroken from the moment of their return home, though it was not yet two months since her husband's death. In these days she read enormously, which again was a new trait — especially novels. She read each through rapidly, laid it down without a word of comment, and took up another. Once or twice, but very rarely,

Marcella surprised her in absent meditation, her hand covering the page. From the hard, satiric brightness of her look on these occasions it seemed probable that she was speculating on the discrepancies between fiction and real life, and on the falsity of most literary sentiment.

To-night Marcella sat almost silent — she was making a frock for a village child she had carried off from its mother, who was very ill — and Mrs. Boyce read. But as the clock approached ten, the time when they generally went upstairs, Marcella made a few uncertain movements, and finally got up, took a stool, and sat down beside the sofa.

An hour later Marcella entered her own room. As she closed the door behind her she gave an involuntary sob, put down her light, and hurrying up to the bed, fell on her knees beside it and wept long. Yet her mother had not been unkind to her. Far from it. Mrs. Boyce had praised her — in few words, but with evident sincerity — for the courage that could, if necessary, put convention aside; had spoken of her own relief; had said pleasant things of Lord Maxwell; had bantered Marcella a little on her social schemes, and wished her the independence to stick to them. Finally, as they got up to go to bed, she kissed Marcella twice instead of once, and said:

"Well, my dear, I shall not be in your way to-morrow morning; I promise you that."

The speaker's satisfaction was plain; yet nothing could have been less maternal. The girl's heart, when she found herself alone, was very sore, and the

depression of a past which had been so much of a failure, so lacking in any satisfied emotion and the sweet preludes of family affection, darkened for a while even the present and the future.

After a time she got up, and leaving her room, went to sit in a passage outside it. It was the piece of wide upper corridor leading to the winding stairs she had descended on the night of the ball. It was one of the loneliest and oddest places in the house, for it communicated only with her room and the little staircase, which was hardly ever used. It was, indeed, a small room in itself, and was furnished with a few huge old chairs with moth-eaten frames and tattered seats. A flowery paper of last-century date sprawled over the walls, the carpet had many holes in it, and the shallow, traceried windows, set almost flush in the outer surface of the wall, were curtainless now, as they had been two years before.

She drew one of the old chairs to a window, and softly opened it. There was a young moon, and many stars, seen uncertainly through the rush of April cloud. Every now and then a splash of rain moved the creepers and swept across the lawn, to be followed by a spell of growing and breathing silence. The scent of hyacinths and tulips mounted through the wet air. She could see a long ghostly line of primroses, from which rose the grey base of the Tudor front, checkered with a dim light and shade. Beyond the garden, with its vague forms of fountain and sundial, the cedars stood watching; the little church slept to her left.

So, face to face with Nature, the old house, and the night, she took passionate counsel with herself. After to-night surely, she would be no more lonely! She was going for ever from her own keeping to that of another. For she never, from the moment she wrote her letter, had the smallest doubt as to what his answer to her would be; never the smallest dread that he would, even in the lightest passing impression, connect what she was going to do with any thought of blame or wonder. Her pride and fear were gone out of her; only, she dared not think of how he would look and speak when the moment came, because it made her sick and faint with feeling.

How strange to imagine what, no doubt, would be said and thought about her return to him by the outside world! His great place in society, his wealth, would be the obvious solution of it for many — too obvious even to be debated. Looking back upon her thoughts of this night in after years, she could not remember that the practical certainty of such an interpretation had even given her a moment's pain. It was too remote from all her now familiar ways of thinking — and his. In her early Mellor days the enormous importance that her feverish youth attached to wealth and birth might have been seen in her very attacks upon them. Now all her standards were spiritualised. She had come to know what happiness and affection are possible in three rooms, or two, on twenty-eight shillings a week; and, on the other hand, her knowledge of Aldous — a man of stoical and simple habit, thrust, with a student's tastes, into the position of a great landowner — had shown her, in the case at

least of one member of the rich class, how wealth may be a true moral burden and test, the source of half the difficulties and pains — of half the nobleness also — of a man's life. Not in mere wealth and poverty, she thought, but in things of quite another order — things of social sympathy and relation — alterable at every turn, even under existing conditions, by the human will, lie the real barriers that divide us man from man.

Had they ever really formed a part of historical time, those eight months of their engagement? Looking back upon them, she saw herself moving about in them like a creature without eyes, worked, blindfold, by a crude inner mechanism that took no account really of impressions from without. Yet that passionate sympathy with the poor — that hatred of oppression? Even these seemed to her to-night the blind, spasmodic efforts of a mind that all through *saw* nothing — mistook its own violences and self-wills for eternal right, and was but traitor to what should have been its own first loyalties, in seeking to save and reform.

Was *true* love now to deliver her from that sympathy, to deaden in her that hatred? Her whole soul cried out in denial. By daily life in natural relations with the poor, by a fruitful contact with fact, by the clash of opinion in London, by the influence of a noble friendship, by the education of awakening passion — what had once been mere tawdry and violent hearsay had passed into a true devotion, a true thirst for social good. She had ceased to take a system cut and dried from the Venturists, or any one else; she had

ceased to think of whole classes of civilised society with abhorrence and contempt; and there had dawned in her that temper which is in truth implied in all the more majestic conceptions of the State — the temper that regards the main institutions of every great civilisation, whether it be property, or law, or religious custom, as necessarily, in some degree, divine and sacred. For man has not been their sole artificer! Throughout there has been working with him "the spark that fires our clay."

Yes! — but modification, progress, change, there must be, for us as for our fathers! Would marriage fetter her? It was not the least probable that he and she, with their differing temperaments, would think alike in the future, any more than in the past. She would always be for experiments, for risks, which his critical temper, his larger brain, would of themselves be slow to enter upon. Yet she knew well enough that in her hands they would become bearable and even welcome to him. And for himself, she thought with a craving, remorseful tenderness of that pessimist temper of his towards his own work and function that she knew so well. In old days it had merely seemed to her inadequate, if not hypocritical. She would have liked to drive the dart deeper, to make him still unhappier! Now, would not a wife's chief function be to reconcile him with himself and life, to cheer him forward on the lines of his own nature, to believe, understand, help?

Yet always in the full liberty to make her own sacrifices, to realise her own dreamlands! She thought with mingled smiles and tears of her plans for this bit

of earth that fate had brought under her hand; she pledged herself to every man, woman, and child on it so to live her life that each one of theirs should be the richer for it; she set out, so far as in her lay, to "choose equality." And beyond Mellor, in the great changing world of social speculation and endeavour, she prayed always for the open mind, the listening heart.

"There is one conclusion, one cry, I always come back to at last," she remembered hearing Hallin say to a young Conservative with whom he had been having a long economic and social argument. "*Never resign yourself!* — that seems to be the main note of it. Say, if you will — believe, if you will, that human nature, being what it is, and what, so far as we can see, it always must be, the motives which work the present social and industrial system can never be largely superseded; that property and saving — luck, too! — struggle, success, and failure, must go on. That is one's intellectual conclusion; and one has a right to it — you and I are at one in it. But then — on the heels of it comes the moral imperative! 'Hold what you please about systems and movements, and fight for what you hold; only, as an individual — *never say — never think!* — that it is in the order of things, in the purpose of God, that one of these little ones — this Board-School child, this man honestly out of work, this woman "sweated" out of her life — should perish!' A contradiction, or a commonplace, you say? Well and good. The only truths that burn themselves into the conscience, that work themselves out through the slow and manifold processes of the

personal will into a pattern of social improvement, are the contradictions and the commonplaces!"

So here, in the dark, alone with the haunting, uplifting presences of "admiration, hope, and love," Marcella vowed, within the limits of her personal scope and power, never to give up the struggle for a nobler human fellowship, the lifelong toil to understand, the passionate effort to bring honour and independence and joy to those who had them not. But not alone; only, not alone! She had learnt something of the dark aspects, the crushing complexity of the world. She turned from them to-night, at last, with a natural human terror, to hide herself in her own passion, to make of love her guide and shelter. Her whole rich being was wrought to an intoxication of self-giving. Oh! let the night go faster! faster! and bring his step upon the road, her cry of repentance to his ear.

"I trust I am not late. Your clocks, I think, are ahead of ours. You said eleven?"

Aldous advanced into the room with hand outstretched. He had been ushered into the drawing-room, somewhat to his surprise.

Marcella came forward. She was in black as before, and pale, but there was a knot of pink anemones fastened at her throat, which, in the play they made with her face and hair, gave him a start of pleasure.

"I wanted," she said, "to ask you again about those shares — how to manage the sale of them. Could you — could you give me the name of some one in the City you trust?"

He was conscious of some astonishment.

"Certainly," he said. "If you would rather not entrust it to Mr. French, I can give you the name of the firm my grandfather and I have always employed; or I could manage it for you if you would allow me. You have quite decided?"

"Yes," she said mechanically,—"quite. And—and I think I could do it myself. Would you mind writing the address for me, and will you read what I have written there?"

She pointed to the little writing-table and the writing materials upon it, then turned away to the window. He looked at her an instant with uneasy amazement.

He walked up to the table, put down his hat and gloves beside it, and stooped to read what was written.

"*It was in this room you told me I had done you a great wrong. But wrongdoers may be pardoned sometimes, if they ask it. Let me know by a sign, a look, if I may ask it. If not it would be kind to go away without a word.*"

She heard a cry. But she did not look up. She only knew that he had crossed the room, that his arms were round her, her head upon his breast.

"Marcella!—wife!" was all he said, and that in a voice so low, so choked, that she could hardly hear it.

He held her so for a minute or more, she weeping, his own eyes dim with tears, her cheek laid against the stormy beating of his heart.

At last he raised her face, so that he could see it.

"So this—this was what you had in your mind towards me, while I have been despairing—fighting with myself, walking in darkness. Oh, my darling!

explain it. How can it be? Am I real? Is this face — these lips real?" — he kissed both, trembling. "Oh! when a man is raised thus — in a moment — from torture and hunger to full joy, there are no words — "

His head sank on hers, and there was silence again, while he wrestled with himself.

At last she looked up, smiling.

"You are to please come over here," she said, and leading him by the hand, she took him to the other side of the room. "That is the chair you sat in that morning. Sit down!"

He sat down, wondering, and before he could guess what she was going to do she had sunk on her knees beside him.

"I am going to tell you," she said, "a hundred things I never told you before. You are to hear me confess; you are to give me penance; you are to say the hardest things possible to me. If you don't I shall distrust you."

She smiled at him again through her tears. "Marcella," he cried in distress, trying to lift her, to rise himself, "you can't imagine that I should let *you* kneel to *me!*"

"You must," she said steadily; "well, if it will make you happier, I will take a stool and sit by you. But you are there above me — I am at your feet — it is the same chair, and you shall not move" — she stooped in a hasty passion, as though atoning for her "shall," and kissed his hand — "till I have said it all — every word!"

So she began it — her long confession, from the

earliest days. He winced often — she never wavered. She carried through the sharpest analysis of her whole mind with regard to him; of her relations to him and Wharton in the old days; of the disloyalty and lightness with which she had treated the bond, that yet she had never, till quite the end, thought seriously of breaking; of her selfish indifference to, even contempt for, his life, his interests, his ideals; of her calm forecasts of a married state in which she was always to take the lead and always to be in the right — then of the real misery and struggle of the Hurd trial.

"That was my first true *experience*," she said; "it made me wild and hard, but it burnt, it purified. I began to live. Then came the day when — when we parted — the time in hospital — the nursing — the evening on the terrace. I had been thinking of you — because remorse made me think of you — solitude — Mr. Hallin — everything. I wanted you to be kind to me, to behave as though you had forgotten everything, because it would have made me comfortable and happy; or I thought it would. And then, that night you wouldn't be kind, you wouldn't forget — instead, you made me pay my penalty."

She stared at him an instant, her dark brows drawn together, struggling to keep her tears back, yet lightening from moment to moment into a divine look of happiness. He tried to take possession of her, to stop her, to silence all this self-condemnation on his breast. But she would not have it; she held him away from her.

"That night, though I walked up and down the

terrace with Mr. Wharton afterwards, and tried to fancy myself in love with him — that night, for the first time, I began to love you! It was mean and miserable, wasn't it, not to be able to appreciate the gift, only to feel when it was taken away? It was like being good when one is punished, because one must — "

She laid down her head against his chair with a long sigh. He could bear it no longer. He lifted her in his arms, talking to her passionately of the feelings which had been the counterpart to hers, the longings, jealousies, renunciations — above all, the agony of that moment at the Mastertons' party.

"Hallin was the only person who understood," he said; "he knew all the time that I should love you to my grave. I could talk to him."

She gave a little sob of joy, and pushing herself away from him an instant, she laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I told him," she said — "I told him, that night he was dying."

He looked at her with an emotion too deep even for caresses.

"He never spoke — coherently — after you left him. At the end he motioned to me, but there were no words. If I could possibly love you more, it would be because you gave him that joy."

He held her hand, and there was silence. Hallin stood beside them, living and present again in the life of their hearts.

Then, little by little, delight and youth and love stole again upon their senses.

"Do you suppose," he exclaimed, "that I yet understand in the least how it is that I am here, in this chair, with you beside me? You have told me much ancient history! — but all that truly concerns me this morning lies in the dark. The last time I saw you, you were standing at the garden-door, with a look which made me say to myself that I was the same blunderer I had always been, and had far best keep away. Bridge me the gap, please, between that hell and this heaven!"

She held her head high, and changed her look of softness for a frown.

"You had spoken of '*marriage!*'" she said. "Marriage in the abstract, with a big *M*. You did it in the tone of my guardian giving me away. Could I be expected to stand that?"

He laughed. The joy in the sound almost hurt her.

"So one's few virtues smite one," he said as he captured her hand again. "Will you acknowledge that I played my part well? I thought to myself, in the worst of tempers, as I drove away, that I could hardly have been more official. But all this is evasion. What I desire to know, categorically, is, what made you write that letter to me last night, after — after the day before?"

She sat with her chin on her hand, a smile dancing.

"Whom did you walk with yesterday afternoon?" she said slowly.

He looked bewildered.

"There!" she cried, with a sudden wild gesture; "when I have told you it will undo it all. Oh! if Frank had never said a word to me; if I had had no

xcuse, no assurance, nothing to go upon, had just called to you in the dark, as it were, there would be some generosity, some atonement in that! Now you will think I waited to be meanly sure, instead of—"

She dropped her dark head upon his hand again with an abandonment which unnerved him, which he had almost to brace himself against.

"So it was Frank," he said—"*Frank!* Two hours ago, from my window, I saw him and Betty down by the river in the park. They were supposed to be fishing. As far as I could see they were sitting or walking hand in hand, in the face of day and the keepers. I prepared wise things to say to them. None of them will be said now, or listened to. As Frank's mentor I am undone."

He held her, looking at her intently.

"Shall I tell you," he asked, in a lower voice—"shall I show you something—something that I had on my heart as I was walking here?"

He slipped his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat, and drew out a little plain black leather case. When he opened it she saw that it contained a pen-and-ink sketch of herself that had been done one evening by a young artist staying at the Court, and—a bunch of traveller's joy.

She gazed at it with a mixture of happiness and pain. It reminded her of cold and selfish thoughts, and set them in relief against his constancy. But she had given away all rights—even the right to hate herself. Piteously, childishly, with seeking eyes, she held out her hand to him, as though mutely asking

him for the answer to her outpouring — the last word of it all. He caught her whisper.

"Forgive?" he said to her, scorning her for the first and only time in their history. "Does a man *forgive* the hand that sets him free, the voice that recreates him? Choose some better word — my wife!"

THE END.